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THE BEATEN PATH



THE BEATEN PATH

A NOVEL

BY

RICHARD LAWRENCE MAKIN

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD.

1903

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Set up, electrotyped, and published August, 1903.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

"This that they call 'Organizing of Labor,' is, if well understood, the Problem of the whole Future, for all who will in future pretend to govern men."

—THOMAS CARLYLE, "Past and Present," Bk. IV, Chap. III.

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CHAPTER I

A CANDIDATE

AN accident had happened at the Leverson Car Works. Being the noon hour, the crowd about the entrance was representative of every shop in Brockton as Dr. Lindley, in answer to the hurry call sent out fifteen minutes before, elbowed his way through the thickly packed mass of human beings drawn together by sympathy or curiosity.

"It's Rough Raggles's little girl," some one called from the front rank for the information of those behind, "and kilt for sure!"

"God help the mother! She doesn't know yet," a woman said half to herself, as she turned away.

"What did they send fer the Doctor fer, if the child's gone? Raggles has no too much money to spend on doctors," remarked a second woman.

"Why, to hold an inquest, you goon," came from a third, with a touch of superior wisdom. "Even one of the Raggles kids will have to have that much done fer it. But you needn't worry. It'll be at ther cost of the county, so Raggles 'll be no worse off. There's enough kids left, I reckon."

The woman who spoke last wore no unkindly face; she was simply taking a glance at the great balance sheet of

life and death as it appeared from her point of view. She had buried a good many children herself and had survived it. On the whole, there were many things worse than death, and she shrewdly suspected the first speaker of a leaning toward the sentimental not to be encouraged.

Meanwhile the Doctor had pushed his way into the freer space inside the shop, where, between the great entrance door, fringed with its rows of curious faces, and the ponderous machinery, now no longer in motion, he came upon a smaller group bending over a mere atom of humanity lying upon a pile of rough coats spread out on the earthen floor.

The child's head rested upon the arm of one of the workmen, who did not turn nor look up as the rest moved aside to let the Doctor pass, but continued in his kneeling position, his eyes fixed intently upon the face of the dead child.

"Electric shock! How did it happen?"

The Doctor asked the question of the crowd collectively, though he lost no time in waiting for an answer, lifting the limp little wrist in his left hand, and passing his right, with a quick professional touch, over the face and shoulders, keeping it for an instant over the heart.

"It war ther big dynamo, the one we calls ther 'Man-killer,' Dr. Lindley," one of the workmen volunteered. "The child brought Raggles his dinner just before noon, and on her way back she cut through the dynamo room. She'd picked up a bit of a scrap of iron to play wid, and in some way she must'er touched the armature. It had its grip on 'er before any of us could snatch 'er away. She's er goner, sure, poor little kid!"

"The same way Fielding was killed last fall," the Doctor muttered, half to himself. "It's the Levenson way of running things;" and then he added aloud, "Where's Raggles?"

"He's been took home all broke up," the same man answered again. "He war 'most afraid to go home ter see his wife, but Meyer, the preacher" (pointing to the man supporting the child's head), "said he'd foller him later wid ther body, soon as ther curriner seen it. I reckon they'd take it kindly, Doctor, if you'd hold the inquest long toward evenin' down to their house. It 'ud be a kind of satisfaction to 'em, and a good many of the hands 'ud like ter be there out of respect to Mrs. Raggles."

"I'll make it half-past seven," the Doctor said thoughtfully. "I shall want any of you who saw the accident as witnesses, and six of you for a jury." And resuming his usual crisp, matter-of-fact tone, he ran over several familiar names of those present, the fact that these appointments were considered to confer a certain degree of distinction upon the recipient not escaping his acute perceptions. He had noticed the same thing under similar circumstances before.

This last duty had brought the Doctor to his feet again. The workman preacher, Meyer, had also risen, bearing the child's body in his arms with a delicacy of touch one would not have looked for in a man of his class. Much thrown as the Doctor was with that class, in his capacity of general practitioner, Meyer was more or less known to him by reputation, but until now he had never found himself at such close quarters with him. It was with a certain growing interest that Lindley observed the man as he stood there without speaking, as if waiting the coroner's permission to depart.

The tall, spare figure, clad in its workman's loose-fitting clothes, might not have attracted attention under other circumstances, but now the Doctor noted that the man held himself more erect than most of his kind, and that the carriage of the head upon the long, thin neck had a certain dignity about it, almost stately, the Doctor thought.

The face was framed in great masses of dark, slightly wavy hair, worn long, while below a scantier beard failed to hide a sensitive mouth, which might have seemed almost womanish had it not been for the deep, strong lines just below it; — lines the purport of which, to Lindley's experienced eyes, there was no questioning, lines of suffering borne patiently. Yet he was young, certainly short of thirty.

His lips were moving slightly, the large, dark eyes still fixed upon the light burden he carried in his arms with this same rapt intensity of gaze as if they were piercing into unfathomable depths, — eyes characteristic of the man and the type, of the religious enthusiast and devotee.

"I know of your work among these people," Lindley said, addressing Meyer directly for the first time. "I'm glad you've consented to go to them in their trouble. You can help them if any one can."

Meyer's face flushed with pleasure at the words, yet the smile which flitted across it died out again as he answered simply: —

"I know I can bring them comfort if they will but take it, — so many will not."

The words puzzled Lindley, but setting them down rather to the peculiar phraseology of a class than being fraught with any special meaning, and being, as usual, pressed for time, he dismissed them without much pondering, and hurried off to the main office of the mill fronting on the street, outside of which he had left his horse and buggy. He had barely reached the door, however, when a light touch upon his sleeve made him turn sharply to find himself facing a young fellow of perhaps five and twenty, whom a moment before he had noticed standing just outside the crowd, an interested spectator of what had been passing.

"I beg pardon for interrupting you in this sad business,"

the stranger began with some hesitation, "but can you tell me if there's any use my waiting here to see Mr. Levenson? I can't find any one in the office, and about all I can elicit from the foreman is that the proprietor of the establishment is not here now."

"They're all more or less rattled over this business," the Doctor said good-naturedly, "but I happen to know from experience that the Levenson Works is about the last place to find Ashton Levenson. If it's any business connected with the Works, you'd better see Mr. Dobson, the Manager."

"No, it has no connection of that kind," the other answered in the hurried tone of a man conscious that he is taking up valuable time, "and yet this is the address given in an advertisement in answer to which I've come some distance, at—at a good deal of inconvenience."

As he spoke, the answer to the advertisement drew from its vest pocket a crumpled bit of newspaper and handed it to the Doctor as if it were a voucher for its respectability. Lindley ran his eye over it, taking in at the same time the sufficiently patent facts that the stranger was very plainly though neatly dressed, and that he looked tired—dog tired.

"Humph! Advertises for a private secretary and gives this address! Odd, and therefore like Levenson," the Doctor muttered. "Here, Dobson!" addressing a tall, spare man with an anxious face, who just then hurried past in the direction of the office. "What's the meaning of this? Levenson's advertised for a secretary and gives this address."

"I'd like to find out who sees the applicants," the stranger put in politely.

"I do, more's the pity," Dobson growled, eying the new arrival with much distrust, though addressing the Doctor.

"They've been turning in here all yesterday and all this morning, and he hasn't so much as left me a word of instructions. I sent the first batch up to the house, as I couldn't tell what in thunder they were after, and he sent back word I wasn't to do that again, and I won't. I just turn 'em loose! So, you see, I'm through with you!" he added, turning contemptuously upon the applicant.

"Very likely," the stranger remarked quietly, "but I'm not quite through with you. I want to know in plain English whether or not the situation's taken. If you don't happen to know, you'd better say so."

"And you'd better get out, young man, and leave me in peace!" Dobson snapped angrily. "I can't be bothered with out-at-elbows candidates for the place of Leverson's puppy-dog."

"Really!" the candidate retorted with amiable composure, though he had thrown back his head and fixed a pair of cold gray eyes on the irate Dobson; "I beg pardon, I thought I was speaking to his puppy-dog."

For an instant there was an ugly look in the Manager's eyes, but the stranger was an easy two inches over six feet, and the Doctor made haste to relieve the situation.

"Oh, come! we haven't time to waste over definitions!" he said good-humoredly. "I know you're rattled over this business, Dobson, but you might find time to answer a civil question."

"Answer! Haven't I answered?" the Manager snorted scornfully. "As he's so anxious to know it, I believe one of the lot that was here this morning went back and got the place, so there's no use any more following." And with another snort Dobson disappeared into the shop.

As he handed back the scrap of paper to the dismissed candidate, Lindley noticed that the slight flush which had mounted to his forehead at Dobson's words had given

place to a deadly pallor, and that, after the manager's exit, he leaned, as if for support, against the jamb of the office door.

"Oh, come, I wouldn't mind him. As I said, he's rattled over this business," the Doctor remarked soothingly. "You've been travelling a goodish bit, I should say," he added interrogatively, with a more careful scanning of the stranger's face and figure. "In from Lancaster, mebb'y?"

"No, I came down the river from Harrisburg yesterday on one of the timber rafts. We got into a good many jams so that we were late in last night, and I put up with some of the lumbermen at one of their inns at the lower end of the town. I was a trifle fagged and had the bad judgment to oversleep myself this morning; which may result, it seems, in my having to walk back again, as the current don't run both ways on the Susquehanna."

The incongruity of a young fellow with the address and bearing of a gentleman, who was an applicant for a position of trust, travelling, from seeming motives of economy, on timber rafts and putting up at lumbermen's inns, did not decrease the Doctor's interest in the new arrival, but he bided his time.

"Oh, I wouldn't give the thing up as hopeless," he began cheerily. "It beats me what in the world Leverson can want a secretary for, but as he does, I wouldn't give it up without a try. It by no means follows that he will get on with this new one, and before the afternoon the place may be vacant again. From what I know of him I should say making vacancies was Leverson's strong point."

"And how far may it be to Mr. Leverson's house?"

"It's pretty well on the other side of the town from here. You can go there by electric cars from the Brockton post-office, and that's a mile. You'd better take a seat in my buggy; I can get you that far."

"You're very good," the stranger answered, his face flushing again. "Your offer sounds tempting."

"Jump in, then," Lindley said, proceeding, without further words, to conduct the candidate through the office and across the narrow sidewalk which bordered the Works on this side, where, shouldering their way through the still gaping crowd, they mounted into the Doctor's comfortable vehicle.

Neither spoke for the next few minutes, the Doctor's attention being entirely absorbed in handling his spirited mare, while his companion threw himself wearily back on the deep seat as if he enjoyed the luxury.

It was only the profile of the face that the Doctor caught when later, the mare having dropped into an easier pace, he turned once more toward his companion, but he saw enough to answer one or two questions that had just entered his head respecting this latest acquisition of Brockton. Despite the weary look in his eyes and his ready acceptance of a helping hand, there was an odd suggestion of self-confidence about him, as perceptible in the closely knit, muscular figure, as in the firmly set lines of a square jaw, the slightly compressed lips, or the broad, low forehead.

"Humph, — enough brain, bone, and tissue to make him more than passable," was the Doctor's inward comment. "Yet he's drawn a bit heavily on the latter. I'll bet a hat he's not tasted breakfast, and here we are at dinner time." This conviction was so strong with the Doctor, and he was so afraid of involuntarily giving it expression, that he plunged into other matters rather abruptly.

"Were you in business in Harrisburg?" he began innocently, flicking a fly off the mare's polished flank, and then apologizing for the liberty with a "Whoa, Nell! Gently, girl, gently!"

"I spent a couple of years with the law firm of Hartley

and Bald as clerk," the other said in the tone of a man anxious to make a good impression. "I've a letter from them here which may prove of use to me, — and after that I took a place on the *Sentinel*, because I couldn't well afford to go on with the law, and thought journalism might give me a chance. I was there nearly a year when the paper changed hands and I was left out in the cold; so after knocking around for a month or two, my eye caught Mr. Leverson's advertisement, and I started out to see if I couldn't better myself here. It struck me there might be a chance to start something on my own account in the newspaper line in a smaller town, and this place with Mr. Leverson would give me bread and butter while I was looking about."

"Yes, I see! Well, if you get the place, your bread's all right, though I'm not so sure about the butter, for Leverson's not given to high wages," the Doctor laughed, running his eye with evident satisfaction over the contents of the large blue envelope his companion handed him. "That's all right," he said as he returned it. "I know Bald slightly myself. I see your name's Thallon — Owen Thallon. Humph! It's a name with a sort of prosperous ring to it, so you ought to get on. All you want, I reckon, is to get started right, and that's what we've got to see to now. I'm sorry you've struck a poor time to see Ashton Leverson on business."

"If you mean it's his dinner hour, I needn't hurry up there, as far as that goes."

"Oh, Lord, no! It's not that. Leverson's a swell and dines late. That's one innovation since his brother's time, — his elder brother, John Leverson."

"Yes? I've heard the name," the younger man said, with the polite encouragement due to one who was giving him a mile lift behind a good horse.

"There was a good fifteen years' difference between the

two, and some other differences which counted for more," the Doctor ran on, with unconcealed delight in his discovery of an absolutely fresh listener who came so highly recommended. "John Leverson did well by his business, and as a natural consequence his business did well by him. He'd built these works by the time he was thirty, and at forty he was a rich man. Never for one little minute what you'd call stuck up, you know, but in his way as proud as Lucifer, as he had a good right to be."

Thallon murmured his appreciation of this admirable quality.

"Had a trick of carrying his head thrown well back," the Doctor went on in pleased reminiscence; "the way you held yours just now when Dobson was trying to jump on you. Oddly enough you reminded me of him then for half a minute. Hello, you're not sick, are you?" This with a touch of professional concern to his companion, who had sunk back into his seat, the gray look on his face again.

"No, not ill, only a trifle fagged. I shall be all right after a bit," the latter said hastily, passing his hand across his forehead as if he brushed aside a distasteful subject. "From what you say" — he spoke now in a lighter vein, not devoid of effort — "I draw the conclusion that you don't like the younger Leverson. As for the brother, it's easy to see that he had all the virtues which go to make up that paragon of goodness, 'the self-made man' — the kind which invariably returns to his native farm to lift the mortgage, endows the village with a library in memory of his mother, or the meeting-house with a chime of bells, marries his early love, the village beauty, and lives happily ever after. No breath of scandal about him, of course."

"All wrong," the Doctor answered, laughing. "John Leverson was anything but a saint. I reckon he had his fling like other boys in his younger days, though that was,

of course, a trifle before my time ; but he did fill the place that belonged to him, and he filled it well, which is more than can be said for his successor."

"Anything but a saint," Thallon repeated slowly, as if he enjoyed the sound of the words. "Yes, I've heard the name before. Pray go on."

"Oh, there isn't much more to tell ; he lived and died a plain Pennsylvania manufacturer, but he made the mistake of trying to educate his brother into something better. Knowing him as I did, I was never able to understand that in him. I suppose there must have been a streak of blamed foolishness back somewhere in the Leverson stock, and that was the way it took to come out in him. For himself, he was satisfied to own and run half of Brockton, as Brockton was in those days, when the lower Susquehanna Valley was at its best. He did it too, before he died, but he certainly encouraged Ashton to look out for broader fields to browse in."

"Literature?" suggested his listener, smiling wickedly.

"The Lord only knows what he'd planned for him. All I know is that he started in wrong. To give Ashton a college education was quite right, though it ought to have been with some definite object, and I suppose keeping him over in Europe needn't have ruined him, but it hardly fitted him to take up his brother's business. I've thought sometimes that he never intended him to take it up at all, but if he had other plans, sudden death turned them all into thin air. Any one would have said that John Lever-son had a good thirty years before him, when at forty-five he turned a sharp corner and went out like a candle. That was three years ago. He died after a week's illness, without so much as a word, let alone the stroke of a pen, and, of course, everything fell to Ashton. How he's taken it up, you'll be better able to judge when you make his acquaintance. Even if he were ready to do the work,—

which he isn't, — he knows no more about running a shop than a five-year-old baby. The whole thing's in the hands of middlemen and superintendents and the result's chaos."

"I judged from his advertisement and from things I've heard, that he was engaged in assisting hungry editors to fill their magazines," Thallon said, in the tone of a man who regarded that as an excuse for anything.

"Oh, my, yes! That is, he thinks he is," the Doctor put in with great contempt. "I hear he's writing a book — a novel, or some such drivel. It's his latest fad, just as last year he went in for yachting, and the year before for horses. If he knows as much about his book as he does about horses, it must be a peach. I suppose he wants a secretary to look out the long words in a dictionary, and to transpose something he's read so people 'll think it's his. Has piles of literary chaps up from the city to eat his dinners for a week at a time and scratch his back until they hear him purr. On the whole a meaner lot I never laid eyes on; though, by the way, I mean no reflection on the profession in general. Journalism's another matter; something might be done at that by a young fellow with push and some vestige of a conscience. However, that's all in good time."

"Yes. What I'm worrying about just now is whether Mr. Leverson can be prevailed upon to employ another middleman," Thallon said, welcoming the change of subject.

"Who'll take the same place at Elmhurst that Dobson does at the mill, some one with unlimited responsibility and no authority. A sort of clerical dry nurse under control of the infant," Lindley said with a shrug, and then gave his attention to his mare again, as she swung into an open gateway, with "Whoa, Nell! Steady, girl! Here we are at my house, as the vixen knows well enough. You'd better come in and take pot luck with us."

For the moment surprise, perhaps, predominated over Thallon's gratitude. At any rate, it was several seconds before he expressed any.

Had he been a less attentive listener, he would have noticed some time before that they had driven a good deal more than a mile and had left the manufacturing and business sections of the town well behind them. The latter part of their way had been through broad macadamized streets shaded by double rows of elms, the large, old-fashioned, frame houses on either side standing well back, surrounded by trimly kept lawns and gardens. It was before one of the least pretentious of these houses that the mare had decided to stop.

"Why, you're very good," Thallon said, finding his tongue by the time the Doctor, with his usual briskness, was out of the buggy, "but I thought you were going to set me down at the post-office."

"So I was, but I've thought better of it. As I've said, you won't find Leverson in before the afternoon, and there's no use your kicking your heels at his house or spending your time at a Brockton restaurant. Brockton's not particularly strong on restaurants, as perhaps you know. Even a dinner at the Lindley's will be apt to set better, besides which I haven't got through talking to you."

As the Doctor had been busily engaged in unharnessing the mare while he said this, the acceptance of the invitation seemed to be taken for granted; nor did Thallon make any further protest, his attention caught by a group of three small children in blue gingham pinafores, who, with a howl of welcome, were rushing down the walk which led from the house, the two larger climbing at once into the horseless buggy, while the smaller one made a descent upon the Doctor's legs.

"For shame, Ned! Do get down, Dot; you're worse

than a couple of colts," the Doctor expostulated. "Come, run along, and tell mother I've persuaded this gentleman to stop to dinner. We'll be in in half a minute, so hurry along."

With the children the Doctor's voice had broken into a pleasant ripple of merriment, and his clear eyes had a becoming twinkle in them as he put the small army on its feet again and watched it in full retreat up the walk, the importance of its mission weighing heavily upon it. But when a few minutes later he put up the mare and rejoined his companion, he spoke in his usual crisp, business-like tone.

Lindley had the reputation in Brockton of being blunt, though that estimate of him was not, perhaps, the one most current amongst the halt, the lame, and the blind. No one who had seen him then, as he breezily led the way up his own front steps, could have discovered in him a suggestion that any consideration for the new-comer's pocket had the remotest connection with this impromptu invitation.

The Lindley's front door opened into a small square hall, on the right of which a second door gave access to a dimly lighted consulting room. Still talking rapidly the Doctor had just crossed its threshold, closely followed by his guest, when the tall figure of a young lady, dressed in some sort of creamy white stuff, rose from one of the cane-seated chairs, advanced a step toward them, and then, perceiving the second figure in the doorway, paused abruptly.

CHAPTER II

MARGARET LEVERSON

"WELL, I declare, Mrs. Leverson, you had the advantage of me," the Doctor said, turning the slats of one of the blinds, which sent shafts of truant sunbeams to dancing on the opposite wall. "If you'll wait just a minute, I'll make Mr. Thallon comfortable in the parlor across the hall, and then I'm all attention, for I see, as usual, you're keen on business, though I hope not professional business this time."

Thallon, to do him justice, had already gone, showing no disposition to linger where he was obviously in the way. If in the brief interval she had stood there before him in the brighter light, he had absorbed a very clear impression of her youth and of her beauty, he had sufficient excuse, perhaps, under the circumstances, in the mere mention of her name. And this impression, received oddly enough from one of whose existence he had until then been utterly ignorant, came to him in the nature of a surprise.

As for her, she had evidently taken no note of Thallon's presence at all, save as a hindrance to the pursuit of her present purpose, though she was, doubtless, properly grateful to the hindrance for taking itself off so promptly.

"It's about this awful accident at the Works," she said in a hurried, anxious tone as the door closed behind him.

The Doctor's face grew suddenly grave. He had been fighting shy of the subject with Thallon for the last half hour, and here it was again. He had a resigned, patient

look, not by any means characteristic of him, as he mechanically motioned her to resume the seat she had just vacated, and dropped into his own swivel chair, which stood in front of an old-fashioned secretary.

"It's a bad business," he began slowly, fussing with the papers on his desk while he collected himself. His foreseeing, as in a sense he did, that in this unexpected interview he would not be at liberty to say precisely what he thought of certain things, made this extremely difficult for him, for he was in the habit of playing what he called a straight game. He had known Margaret Levenson ever since, as Mrs. Gilbreed's second baby, he had assisted her into this world some twenty years before. In any one of the first seventeen of them, he would have said anything he had to say without fear or favor, as his habit was, to Margaret Gilbreed, but he was painfully conscious that Margaret Gilbreed and Ashton Levenson's wife were distinctly different persons.

"I knew, of course, as soon as I heard of it, that you had been called there," she went on. "So I came here and waited. I want you to tell me everything."

The Doctor smiled at the comprehensiveness of this feminine demand, and the smile made it easier for him to go on. He told her the story in a few words, making no comment. He could see that she shrank from it, even though she had forced it from him — just as he could see that she was leading up to something which she dreaded still more; and he knew her well enough to know that she would force that from him, too. She did not keep him long waiting. Her next words, with a directness which might have been his own, brought the difficulty which Lindley had foreseen into the foreground.

"Tell me," she said, leaning forward in her chair and fixing upon him a look of very searching inquiry, "tell me, has any one been blamed? Can any one be held responsible?"

"My dear Mrs. Leverson," the Doctor said, fencing to gain time, "that's a matter for the jury to decide at the inquest."

"You don't understand," she said quickly, though she knew very well he did; "I don't mean legal responsibility. No one could possibly blame Ashton, could they?"

Driven to bay, the Doctor, after an instant's hesitation, faced the thing squarely. He knew that Margaret Leverson had just asked him a question which she would not have asked of any other human being; he was even pretty sure that, but for stress of weather, she would not have asked it of him. Nevertheless, her having done so, put them a long way back toward those old days when she had been only Maggie Gilbreed to him, and had driven for miles around Brockton between his knees, behind the old sorrel, — the humble predecessor of Nell the Peerless. That old relationship brought back with it an old responsibility.

"My dear girl," he said quietly, "you're asking me for my opinion of your husband."

The hot blood mounted to her cheek as she drew back, almost as if he had struck her.

"Oh, you surely can't misunderstand me," she said earnestly, a perceptible break in her voice. "You can't believe I meant anything disloyal to him in coming here to ask you this."

"I don't for one moment believe you disloyal," he answered kindly, though he resisted the impulse to take the little gloved hand which lay hopelessly limp upon the arm of the chair, and give it a reassuring pat. "You've been a good wife to Ashton Leverson, — you wouldn't be here now talking about him if you weren't. I only thought it right to remind you that if you go on talking about him, I've got to tell you honestly what I think."

"I knew you had never liked him," she said, trying to

conceal the effort it cost her, "but I knew you would be just — and — you were the only person who would know. But you are quite right to be honest; you do hold him responsible."

"In a way, yes, — as I'd hold any man responsible who neglects his business. It would be perfectly absurd for me to pretend to you that Ashton Levenson doesn't neglect his."

"How can he be anything else?" she said earnestly, laying a hand beseechingly on the Doctor's sleeve. "He has hated the business and the Works ever since his school holidays, which he was forced to spend here. They've been a weight around his neck from the day they first belonged to him. He hasn't a taste, a thought, in common with the life. How can he fill the place?"

It struck the Doctor that the remedy for such a state of things was obvious enough, but it was no part of his purpose to use arguments which he knew she could not answer.

"Come, come," he said, resuming something of his usual cheerful tone. "As the coroner, I can't, of course, be caught discussing the case, but strictly between ourselves I don't mind telling you that there's small chance of any one being found responsible, though, of course, the jury's uncertain — a mill jury always is."

"Why?"

"Because they're pulled both ways, and it's a toss-up which side will pull the strongest. A mill jury is probably the most prejudiced, one way or the other, of any you could find inside the town limits to pass on a mill accident. And for that very reason they're as unstable as water. Strongest reasons for keeping in with their employers, while on the other hand they're passing on the precautions taken for their own safety. Yet a mill jury we've got to have in deference to local prejudice. The men themselves would resent anything else as outside inter-

ference. If it were wages instead of the life of a child at stake, they'd prove themselves sharp enough, but they'll not drive Leverson into enforcing unpopular regulations. The men must have their dinners brought them, and the women are mostly too overworked to do it. So, rule or no rule, children of that age get the run of the mill. The trouble is nobody cares until it's too late."

"Nobody cares?" she repeated incredulously. "Surely the women —"

"Well, they grow hard enough if there's nothing done to make them care," the Doctor said sadly. "Go into some of their homes and see why they don't. I've been there, and I know."

"I used to go, but of late years there have been reasons. I have been so much away. I wanted to speak to you before going there to-day—wanted especially to ask whether you thought I might offer to help them—the family, I mean."

"With money? no!" Lindley answered thoughtfully, rising as she had risen and walking with her to the door. "Go down, if you like, and show them that you do care, though like as not you'll get small thanks for your pains. The South Sea Islands is not the only place where we grow savages. By the way, does Mr. Leverson know of your going?"

She colored slightly again at the question. "No; he has been away all day, and will not be back until this afternoon. He will be very much shocked when he hears," she said.

"How about his new secretary? I hear he has one."

"Oh, the last one wouldn't do at all; Ashton said he couldn't even spell."

"What luck!" the Doctor ejaculated.

Margaret Leverson naturally looked puzzled.

"Why, you see, I've got a brand new protégé who is after the place," he explained somewhat shamefacedly.

"I suppose I ought to be sorry for the other poor devil, but I've got interested in this one. I'm keeping him now on cold storage in the parlor, and as soon as I'd fed him up a bit, I'd figured on sending him to Elmhurst. He's from Harrisburg, has excellent references, and looks as if he could spell."

"Mr. Levenson will be very busy and anxious over this trouble," she said slowly, "but perhaps, on the whole, your protégé had better go this afternoon. Unfortunately, I know so little about Mr. Levenson's work that I can give you no idea what the chances are." She finished in a tone of apology. "I ought to be more of a help to him than I am, but somehow I don't fit in."

The girl's words said so much more than she meant them to say, the pathos in them was so unconscious, that for a moment the Doctor leaped back again over those past years. He observed now a subtle change in her face which had escaped him in the feebler light of the consulting room. It was not that she looked ill exactly, though certainly paler than in days gone by. Perhaps it was only that the heavy masses of nearly black hair had been drawn closer to the face on either side of the low forehead, which made her look older and more serious. She had the very dark hair and eyes of the Faucons, with a clear white skin, which must have been Gilbreed, though it was absent in the Colonel and not marked in Mildred. On the whole, the Doctor was not especially pleased with his study of her, but all he said was:—

"Where's the carriage? You haven't walked in from Elmhurst!"

"No; I left it in town, and walked from the post-office. You're sure you haven't misunderstood my coming?"

"Misunderstood? Why, it's the kindest thing you've done this long time. Kind to Levenson as well as to me.

You needn't worry about your loyalty ; you've been loyal enough."

She smiled with perfect happiness at the words, for she was only twenty. A moment later he watched her down the front walk with the consciousness that he had, on the whole, played his cards pretty well.

He had wanted to call Leverson a "criminal idiot," but he had held himself in with a firm hand. He now reflected with some self-satisfaction that if he went on thus improving in self-control, he might, in time, turn out a hot second to that accomplished diplomat, Colonel Mortimer Gilbreed.

CHAPTER III

A MOVABLE FEAST

IN the retirement of the Lindley best parlor Owen Thallon had ample opportunity to collect his thoughts under the soothing influence of its florid, large-patterned Brussels carpet, stiffly starched Nottingham curtains, green plush furniture, and china ornaments. If such an influence failed for a time of its due effect, it must have been because the visitor's mind was still occupied with its impression of a young lady in a sailor hat, linen shirt-waist, and white serge skirt, who possessed the aristocratic accomplishment of looking at one as if one were a piece of furniture.

Not that pique or sentiment had anything to do with the interest which Mrs. Levenson had inspired in this humble applicant for a place in her husband's employ. Oddly enough, his only interest in her lay in the fact that she was Ashton Levenson's wife, and so impersonal was it, that it is safe to say he would have experienced the same sensation had she been any one else occupying that enviable relationship. Although he had known a great deal more about Ashton Levenson than Dr. Lindley had seen fit to tell him, this one thing he had not known, and it had its bearing, or he thought it had, upon certain rapid calculations he had been making in those sanguine moments when he regarded the situation he sought as safely within his grasp.

For a man in his position this quality of cool confidence was marked in Thallon, none the less so that it seemed to

alternate with moods of an equally unreasonable depression. If the discovery of the unexpected Mrs. Leverson had inclined him for a moment to the latter state of mind, he now made a determined effort to throw off her baleful influence, even to the extent of turning his attention to the Lindley furnishings as a means of grace.

The only light in the room came from the door which had been left open into the hall, for all the windows and blinds were tight shut. He could hear the murmur of voices which came across from the consulting room, leaving him with the impression that he had been buried alive in an Assyrian tomb, and that his chances of rescue and dinner were getting momentarily farther and farther away.

This, again, being dangerous ground, he resisted the morbid fancy by concentrating his mind on a perfunctory study of two large crayon portraits which hung in heavy gold frames on either side of the marble mantelpiece. The first was undoubtedly intended to represent the Doctor himself in his best clothes, outlined against a light such as never was on sea or land. Its companion, to judge from its similar framing, a likeness of Mrs. Lindley, depicted an exceedingly thin lady who looked as if she had been buried with the earlier of the Assyrian kings and only recently disinterred. As the deceased had apparently departed this life at the age of sixty, this portrait gave Thallon much food for thought. The brood of small children had suggested a late marriage, for the Doctor himself must have been in the neighborhood of fifty, but this work of art threw all reasonable solution of the difficulty to the wind.

Thallon had just made up his mind that Lindley must keep some kind of an infant school to eke out an income derived from a precarious practice, when a door at the farther end of the room opened and a little lady of perhaps eight and twenty, arrayed in faded merino, made her appearance, only to pause abruptly at sight of the

visitor, with an involuntary exclamation of inarticulate apology. Peeping shyly from behind her skirts, the three pinafores children were again in evidence.

"Goodness me! I cert'nly am sorry," she ejaculated, gathering herself together by a comprehensive movement which included the rapid passing of a pair of shapely hands over her back hair. "I'd no idea Theodore sent you in here, where you might take your death of cold coming in from the heat."

"He was kind enough to ask me to stay to dinner," Thallon said, apologetic in his turn. "He has a caller in the consulting room. If I'm the least in the way, I should be quite as comfortable on the piazza," he added with perfect sincerity.

"Well, I should hope we didn't treat company like that," Mrs. Lindley said heartily, opening one of the front windows and closing the door into the hall with another comprehensive movement. "I was only surprised, because he usually puts dinner company into the ground-floor bedroom to wash up, and I'd clean forgotten Mrs. Leverson's being in the office, which opens into it. You see their washing up gives me time to send Victoria down to Bryce's store. Victoria's our hired girl," she went on in amiable explanation.

"I'm afraid I haven't come at a very convenient time," Thallon said politely, ignoring this last piece of information.

"Not a bit of it. It's just as convenient as any other time," Mrs. Lindley returned with naïve unconsciousness of her own humor, while she seated herself on the sofa, fending off the children, who attempted to follow her example, by a dexterous sweep of her thin right arm, which landed them in a heap at her feet. "You mustn't sit on the parlor chairs, you know," she said, addressing them with mild severity. "You're sticky."

The three children, who had been casting furtive glances

at the newcomer from behind her draperies, now deprived of this protection, and conscious of the maternal displeasure, set up a subdued whimper.

"Oh come, I wouldn't cry about it," Mrs. Lindley said cheerfully. "I shouldn't wonder but what you'd better go and play in the dining room till Victoria comes back, and then you can have more bread and jam. You may sit on the dining-room chairs, you know."

This bait proving attractive, the three children toddled away wreathed in smiles.

"We have a great deal of drop-in company," Mrs. Lindley said, as they disappeared through the doorway. "If it hadn't been you, it would have been somebody else. The Doctor brings 'em in because the hotels are so bad. That's what makes the meal hours so uncertain. I don't suppose we'll get dinner much before three o'clock to-day," she went on placidly, glancing at the red-and-white china clock which stood on the mantle.

Something beside Thallon's heart sank within him, but he managed to say politely, "A good many people like dining late."

"*We* have it almost any time from eleven to three," Mrs. Lindley said dreamily. "Once, when the Doctor was away all day, we forgot to have it at all. Victoria's a hard worker, but she has no head."

"Quite like a picnic, a sort of movable feast," the dropped-in remarked gravely.

"Well, I don't know as you'd call it a feast. Victoria's biscuits are so uncertain, but it *is* movable," Mrs. Lindley returned thoughtfully, as if pleased to have that advantage brought to her attention. "Do you like ham?" she went on after a short pause, with one of her startling changes of subject.

The dropped-in had no hesitation in saying that he was deeply attached to ham.

"Oh, I'm so glad," Mrs. Lindley said with placid content. "Victoria's gone to buy one now. When young Williams broke his leg and was laid up here for six weeks, we had ham every day, — he was so fond of it. Williams is a clerk in Bryce's store, and he boards with Mr. Bryce, but he couldn't stay there while he was sick, because Mrs. Bryce has hysterics. I never had hysterics myself; I couldn't give the time to it," she added, as if this omission was something to apologize for.

Looking at her as she sat there with her smiling, almost baby face framed in blond hair which continually wanted to come down, Thallon was very far from questioning the truth of her assertion. Evidently feeling that she had done the honors sufficiently, she now began questioning him about himself and his visit to Brockton, to all of which he gave the same straightforward answers he had given to the Doctor.

The mention of the Leversons seemed to strike a responsive chord in Mrs. Lindley.

"They're awfully rich, you know," she said with a confidential lowering of the voice and an eagerness of manner he had not thought her capable of. "Mrs. Leverson goes to New York every winter, and they say she has beautiful things, though she dresses very plainly when she is in Brockton. She's Colonel Gilbreed's eldest daughter, and there's another daughter and a son. The son's an artist."

Thallon's glance sought instinctively the two crayon portraits on the wall.

"Oh, no, he didn't do those," she said, perceiving his drift with a quickness for which he had not given her credit. "I don't think he could do anything like that."

"Blessed limitation!" was Thallon's inward comment.

"He only does landscapes with little figures in them, though you can hardly tell what they're meant for if you don't look at them from across the room," Mrs. Lindley

went on, by this time miles away from Victoria, ham, and the dinner. "I don't believe he sells many of his pictures, which is a pity, because there isn't any Gilbreed money, — that is, there didn't use to be, though they say the Colonel's done more than well in politics of late years. That's the reason the Gilbreeds moved to Harrisburg three years ago, after Mrs. Gilbreed died, so as to make it handy for the Colonel to run the Legislature. Not that they ain't over here a good part of the time. Mr. Reginald's got a studio in the old Burney house that's to let, and Miss Gilbreed's at the Levenson's most every summer, and the Colonel's got an office in Briscoe's Block, though I reckon he spends most of his time in Brockton at the Everett House talking politics. He's spoken of for the Senate, as, of course, you know, if you're from Harrisburg."

Thallon did know, but the subject failed to interest him. What had his attention just at this moment was the sound of voices in the hall, the closing of the front door, and a light step on the gravel of the front walk. He was glancing through the Nottingham curtains from where he sat at Margaret Levenson's retreating figure, when he was recalled to life by the Doctor's bustling entrance.

"I'm awful sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, kissing his wife. "But Mrs. Levenson's not a person to hurry, because she usually makes good use of her time. She was full of this horrible accident case."

"What accident?" Mrs. Lindley queried, much interested.

The Doctor gave Thallon one of his quick glances.

"Mrs. Lindley's just come in; she's given me no chance to tell her," he said coolly, though he had colored slightly under the Doctor's look. What he said was, in a sense, perfectly true. To mention that he had forgotten all about the thing did not strike him as at all necessary.

The Doctor, already busy answering his wife's questions, seemed quite satisfied.

In the midst of it the rattle of plates in the dining room announced the return of Victoria, whereupon Mrs. Lindley made a rapid exit, while the Doctor pounced upon his visitor and carried him off toward the inevitable "ground-floor bedroom," as if he were about to disinfect him.

"If you want to wash up a bit, you'll find a lot of clean towels in that washstand drawer, — that is, you ought to, if Victoria hasn't forgotten to put them there. Let's see; let's see. Yes, they're all right. Make the best time you can, for Mrs. Lindley's signalling me through the dining-room door that dinner's ready."

Thallon made such very good time, that five minutes later he found himself seated at a very long table in a very small room, so small that the Doctor, at one end of the cloth, had his back against a large, mahogany sideboard, while Mrs. Lindley, at the other, had almost disappeared into a glass extension built out from the dining room on that side.

At Mrs. Lindley's end, Ned, Dot, and the baby were already holding high carnival, their shyness at the presence of strangers by this time largely worn off under the broadening influence of jam. Naturally, under these conditions, the baby was the noisiest. He was one of those florid, soft-looking babies who suggest soft-boiled eggs as the principal ingredient in their composition.

Opposite Thallon, under the Doctor's governing eye, two small girls and a larger boy, evidently just in from school, completed the party. Between these two densely populated ends of the table stretched an uninhabited middle zone, producing nothing but a large plated castor and cruets, a plate of soda crackers, and a dish of pickles.

"We keep it this way because we have so much drop-in company," Mrs. Lindley smilingly explained, observing Thallon gazing at her across this lonely waste.

"We keeps it this-a-way 'cause we has such piles and

piles o' comp'ny," echoed Ned, trying to get at the pickles.

"We keep it this way because it saves putting in leaves," one of the larger girls corrected severely, removing the pickles out of his reach.

"Anita, you mustn't talk so much," the head of the house remarked in parenthesis. "It's only a little awkward, dear," he went on pleasantly, addressing Mrs. Lindley, as he helped her to some of the newly acquired ham, "because it prevents Victoria getting around to this side of the table."

"She reaches across beautifully, though," his wife put in contentedly, "and it's good for the muscles of her chest. You said yourself she ought to take calisthenic exercise on account of her weak lungs, only she hasn't got the time."

The idea that Victoria had weak lungs and no time seemed a source of wonder and delight to the three younger Lindleys. They commented on it in audible asides—showed a disposition to institute anti-mortem examinations whenever that devoted domestic made one of her descents from the kitchen for the purpose of shunting plates or bringing in hot bread, and attempted argument when she exhibited a natural and perfectly proper resentment against such liberties. Thallon, who had no fondness for children in the bread-and-jam stage of development, was, therefore, devoutly thankful when, gorged with their favorite food and wickedly hilarious, they were all sent away from the table in disgrace, going out on a triumphant chorus.

In the reign of peace which followed, and under the strengthening influence of the Lindley ham, Thallon found his spirits rising. He became more talkative, largely with Mrs. Lindley, for since his interview with Mrs. Leverson, the Doctor had frequent lapses into fits of abstraction.

He waked up, however, when he heard his wife saying:—

“Before she was married she used to work down in what the Doctor calls his poor quarter—used to run in here a good deal, too, though the Gilbreeds never went much with town society. The other daughter was always frivolous by my reckoning, but Margaret was what you’d call bookish and serious-minded, though she certainly has got over a good deal of that since she had the Levenson money. The Doctor may say what he likes,—she’s one of his favorites,—but I don’t think money’s improved Margaret Levenson.”

“Well, well, we won’t criticise her! Perhaps it wouldn’t improve us if we had it,” the Doctor said absently. “By the way, I got in a word with her in your favor, Mr. Thallon. It’s just as I thought; the late incumbent’s already departed, so you’ve got a clear field ahead of you. She advises striking while the iron’s hot.”

“I’ll lose no time,” Thallon said heartily, “and I’m more than obliged to you and to her.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Lindley said, waving away his protégé’s gratitude with a flourish of his tea-cup. “I’m only the more pleased that Mrs. Levenson came in. I didn’t know I cared so much about the girl until I saw her seated there in one of my big chairs—where she used to curl up as a little thing. Yes, yes, we were great friends in those days. You see she ran wild, more or less, for her mother was a bedridden invalid for years, and the Colonel’s not what you’d call motherly. Well, however she’s brought herself up, she’s got some good stuff in her, has Margaret Levenson. I’ll admit I was a trifle disappointed that she didn’t accomplish more in the Levenson world, but I fancy that’s more of an undertaking than most of us realize. He’s so hopelessly sloppy; I hate a man who’s sloppy.”

It struck Thallon as odd that this quality, which in Lev-

erson seemed to so irritate the Doctor, failed, when personified in Mrs. Lindley, to make the slightest impression on him. Possibly in her it was too near to be within his range of vision.

"Well, I shan't worry over the Leverson morals just at present," Thallon remarked, smiling at the thought which had just passed through his mind, and talking, in consequence, a little at random. "The work of a private secretary has nothing to do with morals."

"There I entirely disagree with you," the Doctor put in with a slight frown and thoroughly awake again. "All work in this world and presumably in the next is either moral or immoral just so far as it's done, or not done, for its own sake. Yes, sir! I've always claimed there's marvellous dignity in true labor. You've read Charles Kingsley, of course?"

The Doctor's new acquaintance, though he confessed to ignorance of the author named, more than redeemed his reputation before the movable feast was half over. It appeared that he had atoned for the deficiency by reading a great many other books; that beyond this he possessed fairly well-developed thinking powers, and was, speaking collectively, not at all disappointing to the Doctor. And yet, he remained, to a certain extent, a puzzle to the latter, who himself, as transparent as crystal and imbued with an extensive though not vulgar curiosity, was inclined to resent any very noticeable reservations. Not that he could have put his finger on any such in the present case. On the contrary, Thallon was to all intents and purposes perfectly frank. The impression that he had left something of importance untold was merely a vague, a hardly recognized sensation, somewhere deep in Lindley's consciousness.

And on the other hand, as has been said, what the Doctor had learned was so eminently satisfactory. When in the course of dinner the additional fact developed that this

stray bit of humanity was a college-bred man, who had taken to journalism as the shortest road to fortune, the capstone of the triumphal arch which the Doctor had been building in his honor was firmly cemented in its place. That in itself was a patent of nobility in the eyes of Lindley, whose great weakness was some little conceit over his own culture which, by the way, was not his strongest point. In this congenial atmosphere the Doctor quite regained his usual spirits, and in spite of the length of the board, and the fact that Victoria had forgotten to make any dessert, it was really a very lively party which rose from the Lindley table half an hour later.

Mrs. Lindley had evidently taken a great fancy to her guest, and made him promise to come again before she disappeared kitchenward in search of the pinafores, while the Doctor and Thallon strolled back into the consulting room.

"And now I suppose you ought to be off chasing fortune," the Doctor said, shoving a box of big black cigars across his desk to Thallon and lighting one himself. "For my own part, I ought not to keep you, for I've got a big afternoon's work ahead of me besides that miserable business to-night."

Thallon found being popular so pleasant that he took advantage of this opportunity to encourage the Doctor's confidence.

"You seem to count a good deal on this preacher, Meyer; what sort of a man is he?" he asked, with polite interest.

"That's an easier question to ask than to answer," Lindley said thoughtfully. "He came here some six or eight months ago, and began his work at the shops simultaneously with his preaching. I suppose he belongs to one of those numerous small sects, who think they've found a short cut to heaven. Nevertheless, he's got some-

thing in him, you can see that in his face — a brave face, though a sad one."

"I suppose it must be a sad sort of a life," the younger man said, instinctively echoing the Doctor's tone.

"Any one who probes a little beneath the surface finds matter enough for gravity. I imagine Meyer has gone to the root of matters. I say 'imagine,' for I've never made any effort to hear him, but I know the class he has to deal with, and it's discouraging. Well, if you get the situation you're after, you won't be troubled with economics; Leverson doesn't spend his time in that way."

"I don't know that I shall regret it much," the other said with a short laugh. "So far, I've found keeping my own head above water about as much as I can attend to. It seems to be every man for himself, as well as I can make out."

"You don't finish the quotation," Lindley answered sadly, "and the rest of it is equally true. It may or may not be satisfactory to know that the devil usually does take those who drop out, but we *do* know it."

"I've been close enough to dropping out to realize that," Thallon said, as they went into the hall. The words conveyed a suggestion of bitterness new in him, but it was gone again as he held out his hand at parting.

"Perhaps I've got more to thank you for than a good dinner," he said, with a ring of really genuine feeling in his voice. "You see I've got to one of the rough places in the road, and, in spite of your pessimistic views about Mr. Leverson, you've managed to inspire me with fresh courage."

"Oh, that's all right," the Doctor returned. "I only wish you well wherever you go, and if I've been a bit of a help, why, pass it along, that's all. You're within a square of the electric here, and you get out at Locust Avenue. Any one 'll show you Elmhurst, as they call what is left of

the old Leverson farm. Good-by, and good luck to you!"

The last words were said at the head of the front steps, dismissing his guest with one of his hearty hand-shakes, and then turning back into his consulting room with the smile still lingering about the corners of his large, plain mouth.

"On the whole I like him," he said to himself, drawing out his medicine case and beginning to refill it, "and outside of that he interests me. I'm curious to know how he'll affect Leverson. It's a precious long time since anything affected Leverson."

CHAPTER IV

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

THE smile had faded from Margaret Leverson's face before she reached the corner. Although she walked steadily on, she took more time than was absolutely necessary in reaching the pony phaeton at the post-office. It was easy to see, as she drove slowly down the main street of Brockton, that Ashton Leverson's wife had a popularity peculiarly her own with the shop-keeping class. That it was not ascribable to the commercial value of the Leverson patronage might have been inferred from its not being confined to the heads of flourishing establishments. Every butcher's boy, driving with the delightful abandonment of his kind, slowed up at the sight of her shaggy pony, that he might properly touch his hat to her. When he got a nod and smile in return, — as he was pretty sure to do, — he grinned with unfeigned satisfaction.

A mile or two beyond the main street, however, she was conscious of a marked change in the friendliness, so to speak, of her surroundings. The great factories, which now filled the space between the road and Brockton Creek, frowned down upon her as if they had been so many mediæval fortresses prepared to resist her invasion. The few visible denizens of the opposite tenements stared at her from upper windows, or the doorways of corner saloons, with stony indifference or a feeble curiosity. Though Brockton born and bred, she was obliged several times to stop and ask her way, using the name of Raggles

with confidence as one well known in mill society — a confidence not misplaced, for she was directed, with great unanimity, to a residence quarter some distance beyond the factories, referred to by the attractive name of "The Swamp."

The appropriateness of the title was apparent enough when she at last caught sight of it; a collection of half a dozen wooden shanties huddled together on a bit of lowland between the road and the creek not as yet utilized for manufacturing purposes. Out of this lowland the road itself had been built up until it overtopped the irregular roofs and rickety chimneys, but below the moisture of the original swamp was evidenced by several pools of stagnant water, steaming under the afternoon sun. A decayed wooden stairway led from a hole in the fence above to one of the larger puddles of water below, crossed by a couple of heavy planks laid from the lowest step to a bit of comparatively dry ground beyond.

Tying the pony to one of the fence pickets with some misgivings as to his safety, Margaret Levenson descended the stairway, and, crossing this primitive bridge, paused before the door of the first cottage she came to in some uncertainty.

The door was closed, and even the blue cotton shades of the two windows were drawn, though the windows themselves were open, and through them several voices inside were distinctly audible. A moment later these voices ceased, and a man's voice of peculiar richness and power went on alone, as if he were reading; the words, those of St. John the Evangelist, beginning, "I am the resurrection, and the life."

Margaret frowned slightly, a sensation of annoyance, curiously enough, uppermost in her mind. Her hand had been upon the rough wooden latch of the door, but it dropped to her side, and she stood there listening. To a

girl of Margaret Levenson's education and environment, any participation in an emotional, religious service was in itself repugnant. In her own estimation of her character she had already passed through a period of certain high, though vague, enthusiasms which had led her nowhere. They had left her doubtful, not only of their own efficiency, but in the efficiency of any sustained effort toward exalted spiritual activity. Membership in St. Stephen's, under the preaching of the Rev. Cuthbert Faucon, had not, in Margaret's case, proved an incentive to an emulation of the early Christian martyrs. She had come here to-day to express a purely animal sympathy which, however deep and real, had in it no uplifting purpose that she was conscious of. With an immature, unformed, quite unrecognized scepticism, she had seen nothing in that prompting under which she still acted, beyond the obvious duty of the helping hand. Even that was only obvious because it came to her with the authority of an intuition. The same thing comes to all animals which have developed hearts, notably, dogs. This impulse was all she had to offer.

The feeling that she had been forestalled by something these people would probably like better, came to her as a distinct disappointment, yet the characteristic thing about the girl was, that despite all this, she never thought of retreat. Gilbreed had, at least, transmitted this one of his few virtues to his eldest daughter. His tenacity was proverbial in Brockton. The main difference between them was that the Colonel's grip on things was exercised exclusively for his own benefit.

But in the midst of her undefined dissatisfaction she found herself listening. If the man were reading, he certainly read well, giving to words she knew by rote a deeper significance than she had believed them capable of. Or was it only that the penetrating, resonant voice, despite herself, touched some chord long dormant in the

depths of her soul, and set it vibrating in unison with its own harmony. How it made the words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," ring with a triumphant certainty; how insistent a faith resounded in that last line, "yet in my flesh shall I see God"!

But though for the moment her trained ear revelled in the music of the voice, the feeling of disappointment was still there. For anything she knew, she might be expected to read the Bible to these people, and if she were, she could not possibly read like that. She had no such voice, and, she added, with her usual frank introspection, she had no such faith.

The loud sobbing of several women had broken in upon the reading. For a moment the reader paused as if he faltered in his task, then went on again with renewed firmness through line after line of the Poet King, repeating a note struck three thousand years before as if it had been but yesterday: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." Then it ceased. Inside there was the shuffling of heavy shoes — a lighter step — the door of the shanty was thrown violently open, and a tall girl, perhaps a year or two older than herself, stood confronting her upon the threshold.

Her slight though shapely figure was clothed in a slatternly, calico dress, which she had torn open at the throat, as if the heat of the room inside had stifled her. Her face, distorted and discolored as it was by recent weeping, was still strikingly handsome, and despite her obvious misery, she held her head high, with a carriage which had a touch of defiance in it. There was, in fact, more than a touch of defiance in the look she gave the would-be visitor, — that is, as soon as it ceased to be one of amazement, — for the encounter was evidently as unexpected upon the one side as upon the other.

Margaret Levenson was the first to speak.

"I came to see Mrs. Raggles in her trouble," she said simply. "I'm Mrs. Levenson."

The girl had turned and carefully closed the door, which opened into a tiny hall behind her, and now stood there facing Margaret as if she were determined to bar her entrance, and to prevent her presence being known to those within. In both objects she was, so far, perfectly successful. They had begun to sing a hymn, and could by no possibility have heard Margaret, who had purposely spoken in a low tone.

At Mrs. Levenson's mention of her name, the girl's seemingly causeless antagonism, typified in the dull red which burned upon her cheeks like some hidden fire newly fanned, burst into flame.

"Well, ye can't see 'er," she said in a voice none the less savage that she kept it low pitched, and speaking with an evident effort to make every word tell. "Ye can't see Mrs. Raggles in her trouble; 'cause why? 'Cause she ain't no show for rich folks ter come an' look at! That's why!"

"You have no right to speak to me in that way!" Margaret said, holding firmly to her purpose, and not without strong resentment. "I have a right, at least, to offer her my sympathy. There are things which can be said at such a time."

"An' ain't they bein' said now? Ain't ther preacher in there tellin' her this very minute it's all fer the best, jus'-as-if she didn't know that already. Jus'-as-if she didn't know 'twas better ter lose the kid than to have it grow up like me."

"I had no intention of telling her it was all for the best," Margaret said, puzzled at the strange personality of the girl, yet the tension on her own nerves relieved by the curious turn in events which her presence had brought with it.

"Well, 'tis, whether ye say so or not. Do ye think she don't know what was waitin' fur it with me, the livin' picter of the life, standin' here afore her? No sir-ree! The Raggles kids is like me, they is, a sight too good-lookin' to do well in this world, — nor in t'other one either, if they don't git there airly."

"Were you her sister?" Margaret asked, terribly shocked, though she was far from grasping the full significance of the girl's words.

"No, I warn't, but that don't make no difference. I'm Louise Dupré. Canada French my folks is, but I was born hereabouts, somewhere. All I know is we've lived in the swamp in that shanty over yonder since long afore th' kid come. I've seed it grow up from a little soft, helpless thing that the women kissed and crooned over, till it got big enough to toddle an' be played wid after work hours. I've seed it; but what's the use er talkin'," the girl broke off with a dry sob, though she still kept her defiant eyes on Mrs. Levenson's face.

Led by the deep, strong voice the singing of the hymn still went on — Newman's hymn, "Lead, kindly light." To Margaret the girl's words, even the girl herself, seemed ghastly by contrast.

"Oh, I am so sorry for you," she said, struggling with that horrible oppression which now seemed shutting down upon her like a nightmare; using the words without any thought of their effect upon the girl, using them simply as a relief to her own overburdened soul.

For a moment Louise Dupré looked at her doubtfully (which in itself was a change for the better) and then, moved by one of those strange impulses which seemed her only impelling force, left her place in the doorway and advanced a step or two toward her.

"It ain't in reason," she said slowly, "that you can really care, but perhaps I ain't got no right to keep ye

from sayin' so. The preacher 'll be goin' in a minnit, and anyway, I s'pose they'd be a good bit set up by yer comin'. It'll be something more to git into the papers, an' the more they git inter them the better they like it."

Though this frank disclosure of a weakness for publicity on the part of the Raggles family was neither in good taste nor good nature, it was perfectly evident to Margaret that what the speaker resented was a supposed invasion of the sacredness she attached to her own sorrow. Viewed in this light it had its extenuation, as had even the girl's ungracious treatment of herself. She saw, however, that any further talk was useless, so contenting herself with laying her hand kindly on the girl's arm, as she passed her, she stepped to the door and knocked, feeling some encouragement in the thought that she had come out triumphant in this first encounter.

After some delay and renewed shuffling, the door was opened by a thick-set man who stood staring at her stupidly, though after she had given her name and the reason of her visit, he held it wide enough open for her entrance without the protest she expected. This was evidently Raggles himself.

The small, low-ceiled room within seemed shrouded in semi-darkness to eyes fresh from the bright sunshine. For several seconds Margaret was conscious only of a great, white bed in one corner, upon which lay a tiny form also very white, and of the tall figure of a man who stood beside it against a background of deep shadow. He was replacing a handful of common wild flowers upon the dead child's breast; his eyes fixed earnestly upon the small, white face. At Margaret's entrance, however, bringing with it a momentary gleam of light from the open door, he turned toward her, his face breaking into a grave smile, as it might have done had he expected and wished her presence.

Margaret, though she knew of him by hearsay only, had no difficulty in recognizing Meyer, the mill preacher, in this strange presence which so easily dominated the little room. She was not even sure — and the sensation was displeasing to her — that it did not dominate her own personality as well. She felt impatient with herself for harboring the passing fancy that the delicate, refined face was strangely luminous in the surrounding gloom.

It was evident enough, now, that he had been simply repeating from memory the words she had overheard, but all that only occurred to her afterwards; at the time she was only oddly possessed by the impression that he and she were alone with the dead child, almost in a world by themselves. Yet she knew that besides the man Raggles, who had let her in, there were three women in the room, two of whom presently rose and went out softly; the third, still kneeling at the foot of the bed, her head buried in her hands, was, of course, the mother.

Raggles himself still stood by the door shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, a sense that something ought to be done by way of proper reception of so distinguished a guest obviously growing strong upon him.

"It's Mrs. Leverson, Lizzie, come in her own kerridge," he at length broke out, with admiring emphasis upon the last word despite a quick motion on Margaret's part enjoining silence. "An' particular kind it is, mum, fer a fine lyedie like yersel' ter come at a time like this, when the poor's i' trouble. What wid funeral expinses an' ther like —"

His wife, who had risen from her knees, here suppressed further speech upon the part of her ingratiating husband with a look of withering contempt.

"It's not worritin' 'bout funeral expenses I am," she said, flushing hotly through her tears. "There ain't no use anybody's comin' if they can't gimme back the

baby; an' all ther Leverson money can't do that, I'm supposin'."

"Please don't think of me as Mrs. Leverson, but just as another woman who feels for you and sorrows with you," Margaret said earnestly. "I know I can do nothing more than that, but surely that is something."

It was in fact what she had come to say. Words as far removed from the high note struck by the preacher as from the sordid misery of Raggles. Meyer's face had clouded when the man had spoken, but now, as Margaret glanced at it as if in confirmation of what she said, it bore again the smile of comprehension and approval.

The woman looked doubtfully at her for a moment, the same look that Margaret had seen on the face of Louise Dupré; then her face, too, lit up.

"Ye means well enoug', lyedie, I'm mistrustin'," she said slowly. "Ye may be comin' agin when I can be more civil, but leave me now wid ther child, the time's so short like."

Margaret pressed for an instant the large, coarse hand, then, her own eyes well under control, she left the room silently. It was a close shave, and she felt that she had won her shoulder-straps. Snivelling over other people's sorrows was a wretched way of helping them, according to her creed.

When she reached the world outside, she found that Meyer had followed her, and now, touching his worn workman's hat, joined her without further apology. The look of ineffable sadness, which she had seen upon his face at Raggles' words, had not returned. An expression, almost triumphant, had stamped itself upon the firm mouth. Despite the lines of past toil and suffering, despite an almost infinite patience which glowed in the dark eyes as if they knew that his chosen calling could bring him nothing but work and sorrow in the years to come, it was

the face of a man who would welcome both,—sure of the end.

Margaret was conscious that Louise Dupré, in charge of several small Raggleses, was standing before one of the cottages a hundred yards off, regarding her curiously. Several stragglers on the road above had stopped to look down at them.

All this annoyed her. She felt herself anxious to get away, and yet she lingered. Still against her will she felt as she stood there with him, as if they shared in common some great spiritual purpose, though she had never seen him until to-day — had not as yet exchanged a word with him. The absurdity of the fancy was perfectly clear to Margaret Levenson's very practical mind. With nothing but kindly feeling for him and his work, they could really have but very little in common.

Bowing slightly, she turned to go when he stopped her with a word.

"I want to thank you for them," he said with his usual quiet earnestness. "They do not themselves know how to thank you."

"It was nothing," she said coldly. "I could have done no less."

"Nay, you have done all," he answered smiling. "You have brought them infinite pity — which is God!"

CHAPTER V

LAZARUS AND DIVES

MRS. LEVERSON'S frank eyes had been fixed rather searchingly on Meyer's face as he uttered those fervid, almost passionate words of thanks. Apparently quite unconscious of having given any offence, he had borne the scrutiny very well. For the moment his enthusiasm had seemed to her so grossly exaggerated as to almost suggest personal flattery; something difficult for her to forgive in any one; doubly so in an utter stranger and a man of his class, of whose sincerity she was by no means certain.

Then came a reaction, and she saw the thing in a totally different light. What he had said, when she came to analyze it, had no personal application whatever; he had but done reverence before an abstract quality to which she herself had laid claim in her first words to Mrs. Raggles. He had simply accepted the character she herself had assumed; how contemptible she was to have thought anything else.

The consciousness of having done him an injustice in this regard did much to modify her first prejudice against him, or rather against the fervid, religious atmosphere with which his presence seemed to surround her. She would have been, in any case, anxious to avoid the betrayal of any feeling, or lack of feeling, which could have hurt a sensitive soul, obviously struggling against great odds. For all suffering things Margaret Leverson had a great fund of latent tenderness, stored somewhere deep in her

own starved soul, that only reached the surface now and then in a touch, a nod, or a smile.

She had turned, and was walking slowly toward the stairs which led to the road above, now lying in the glorious warmth of the afternoon sun. Here below, in the hollow, the shadows of the coming evening had fallen before their time. Despite the warmth of the spring day there was already a damp chill in the air; the place itself was inexpressibly desolate.

"What a horrible place for human beings to live in," she said with a shudder, addressing Meyer, who still walked by her side, her eyes on the puddles of stagnant water on either side of the muddy path.

"We are doing what we can," he answered in a tone of eager explanation, "to make it better. We are cutting drains at the back toward the creek and have even begun filling in. In a few days we hope to reach this part of the ground, though it is less dangerous than the other, having only surface water."

"But why have they built their cottages in such a swamp? There's surely land enough."

"Not waste land like this, which they can have for nothing, that is near enough to the mills for them to walk to their work. Some day, of course, they will count this as valuable for mill-building purposes, but in the meantime it is held as worthless. Years ago the Canadian French and some of the Irish took advantage of that to put up these cottages, and they have squatted here ever since, — mostly the poorer laborers who earn low wages."

"They must be very poor to live in a place like this," she said, glancing back at the cottages.

"A two-room tenement in the town would cost them six dollars a month. They save that here," Meyer answered sententiously, as if that explained everything.

"But they have no right to make the place a menace

to the public health," Mrs. Leverson said severely. She wanted the man to know she was eminently practical.

"That is true; but I have urged the Health Inspector to give them one more chance, because it is equally true that if they are moved from here, they have no other place to go without giving up their work in Brockton. If possible, I want to avoid that. They have worked hard lately, — for it is only lately they have learned what could be done, — and now, when it is only a question of a few days' patience before this work is finished, it would be so hard for them to throw it all away. You do not, you cannot know what it is for these people to move away. It would be months before they found work elsewhere."

He spoke in his usual simple English, yet he emphasized everything he said by a rapid movement of the hands which was distinctly foreign. Perhaps it was that which made Mrs. Leverson especially notice them, when, having reached the top of the stairs, he moved forward to untie the pony for her. She saw then how worn and callous they were, — hands of the day laborer rather than the skilled mechanic; yet she knew from the Doctor that the man held one of the best-paid positions in the Leverson Mills. She was conscious that she had made some little delay in order to observe him more closely. In a sense he was more than worth the trouble.

As he stood there with the gentle spring breeze just stirring his dark, wavy hair, he might have typified a messenger of peace, yet the man's talk, the man's thoughts, were commonplace enough — an everyday wrestling with the rough-hewn problems of a hard life, nothing picturesque, much less spectacular, about *them*.

"I don't see how you can take so much time away from your work," she said, looking at him curiously as she gathered up the reins.

"My work? Why, that is here!" he answered as if the

question puzzled him, waving his hand toward the forlorn vista just below them, although the gesture was sweeping enough to include the alder-fringed banks of the creek, the railroad sheds, and coal pockets on the opposite side, and in the distance where the narrower water lost itself in the great river; smoke-begrimed Brockton itself as a background.

Down by the cottages the group of Raggles children, dominated by Louise Dupré, still stood in the deep shadow staring up at them.

"Can you find any hope in such work as that?" Margaret said, without taking her eyes off the girl. Why she had singled her out as the acme of discouragement she hardly knew herself, but Meyer seemed to understand.

"There is always hope," he said simply.

"But you can have no influence with these Roman Catholics," she said. "Either French or Irish, their priests would not allow you within a hundred yards of them."

"It is not so bad as that," he answered with a sad smile. "Father Duffy is not unfriendly, and more liberal than you think, but it is true they would not count themselves among my people. My being here to-day is quite outside of that. The Raggleses are English Methodists."

"What up-hill work it is!" she said with a sigh. "Even I can see you are working against enormous difficulties."

"It is always difficult to teach the love of God and the brotherhood of man to a people who can only see the indifference of the one in the heartless greed of the other," the preacher said wearily.

She looked at him with a glimmer of hard humor in her eyes. His use of a hackneyed, much-abused phrase had brought back her half-effaced mistrust of him. Though she had not been born of the manufacturing class, she had married into it, and she had its arguments at her fingers' ends.

"It might be well for them to take that lesson home," she remarked composedly. "Almost any of them will lie for the sake of getting their children into the mills before the legal age. Raggles just now would gladly have made his child's death a means of profit. I don't think you'll find the greed all one side."

"I did not say it was," he returned quietly. "Far from it! I would have no work here if what you say were not true; for if they could live this life and not return greed for greed, indifference for indifference, extortion for extortion, I should be here to learn, not teach."

He spoke with the first touch of bitterness she had noticed in him. She put it down to class prejudice, which, while not wholly just, was perfectly natural. Her next question showed no resentment, though there was a constraint in her voice that had not been there before.

"And you go on working quite alone?" she asked.

"I am never alone."

"I mean, of course, as far as human aid goes," she said with an impatience she was instantly sorry for.

"So few know anything of the work, but it will come in time," he answered. He had not, apparently, noticed her tone; in fact, spoke more to himself than to her.

"I would like to feel that I was of some practical help," she said rather awkwardly, producing a little steel purse from a refractory pocket, and holding out its contents, at most a dollar or two, toward him. The Doctor had said nothing against giving *him* money. His face flushed again as he caught her meaning, and he drew back out of arm's reach.

"I can't take your money, Mrs. Levenson," he said firmly.

"Why not?" she asked, surprise and annoyance discernible in her tone. People like that were not in the habit of thwarting her wishes.

"Because if I took it, I should not see you here again, and I am very anxious to see you here again."

"How do you know you would not see me?"

"You would be satisfied you had done all that you could do; but you would be wrong. Your interest — your warm, deep-stirred, woman's interest — is worth so much more than your money."

In her pique it had been on the tip of her tongue to say, "You think it worth more than two dollars," for Margaret Levenson was possessed of a keen sense of humor, and her quick mind, staggered at the sight of a missionary who refused subscriptions, had felt inclined to credit him with playing for higher stakes; but the way he pronounced those last words of his made her feel as if she had laughed in some great cathedral. She saved herself by asking soberly:—

"Why do you care so much about having my interest?"

"Because you are the only link between this world of mine and that of yours. I want to make them both mine; neither can be what it should be without the other."

"But there is plenty of charity work done in Brockton," she said incredulously.

"Not by your world nor in mine," he said, shaking his head. "The time will come when I shall need you, even more than I need you now; the time may even come when you will need me. I do not ask, would not accept a promise; only, when you do need me, come."

"Very well, we will leave it so," she said, smiling at his earnestness and wishing to bring him back, not unkindly, to simpler matters, for, to tell the truth, she did not like the personal note he had struck. "Tell me," she went on, gathering up the reins again as if she must be going, "tell me, when you speak of your work as centred here, do you mean that you think of giving up your place in the mill?"

"Very largely, yes."

"But you have got to live!" she exclaimed incredulously.

"I shall live as long as there is any work for me to do," he answered, smiling.

"If you intend making your preaching your principal work, your congregation ought, of course, to support you," she said with great decision.

"It is all a part of the same work," the man answered. "Now it takes this form, now that, as the call may come. When I first came here, eight months ago, money was urgently needed for many things, and it could be got more quickly from my earnings in the mill than in any other way. But now it is different; they begin to need me more than they need my wages." His eyes sparkled as he said these last words with a light she entirely misunderstood.

"I am glad you are doing so well," Margaret answered, smiling in her turn, and then, conscious that she had rather overstayed her time, she nodded and drove on, leaving him standing there in the middle of the road, his workman's hat held respectfully in his hand until she disappeared around a bend in the road. It occurred to her afterwards that she had never asked him what sect he represented. Perhaps, like Savonarola, he represented nothing so much as his own longing to reveal the Divine Love, in which case it was satisfactory to know that the age he lived in was more lenient toward such heresy than that which silenced and condemned the great Italian.

Still deep in this rather odd comparison, Margaret had some excuse for starting slightly at the sound of her own Christian name pronounced with a good deal of emphasis from the street crossing, as she drove past the Central Railroad station on her way into Brockton.

"You needn't cut your own father," Colonel Gilbreed went on with playful reproach as she drew up, "especially as he may be a United States Senator before the

end of the month. I'm just in from Harrisburg on the five-thirty and would like a lift as far as Elmhurst, if you'll be so good."

The Colonel was a tall, soldierly looking man, being driven into the fifties under protest, as was evinced by the elaborate care bestowed upon such remnants of his past youth as still remained to him. From the thin black hair, carefully brushed over those portions of his retreating forehead where it would do the most good, down through the gradations of his well-trimmed mustache, four-in-hand tie, and gold-linked cuffs, to his small feet covered by immaculate patent leather, the best had everywhere been made of him. His voice, raised to the proper pitch of paternal greeting when he began, was lowered in mentioning his coming honors to a tone of modest caution, and he glanced back at the sidewalk to make sure no one had overheard.

"Why, you said nothing about Harrisburg when you went off with Ashton this morning," Margaret said in some surprise, as she made room for him on the seat beside her and turned the pony's head homeward. "The legislature doesn't adjourn for three weeks yet; I thought you'd cut politics for a week. You said the Senatorship was as good as settled."

"So I thought until I had an infernal telephone message from Trotters early this afternoon. We put the yacht into Beverly about one, and I called him up to see how things were going on, and I found out a great deal more than I wanted to know. So I called up Mildred and told her to wait lunch for me until two and took the first train on. Nothing serious, you know, but a case for the boss plumber to attend to without consulting his lawyer. *Comprenez?*"

A rather jocular, altogether ingratiating manner belonged naturally to the Colonel when he addressed a lady, even when it happened to be, as in this case, one of his own

daughters, and not his favorite daughter at that. He had never spoken to her mother in any other tone from the day he had made her his wife to the day he laid her in her grave twenty years later; during which period he had managed to squander every cent of her very comfortable fortune with an ease common to others of his calibre and an utter lack of gratitude peculiarly his own.

"And Ashton?" Margaret asked, ignoring the Colonel's delightful figure of speech.

"Oh, he and the two literary chaps had got mortal sick of the fishing, — or rather they got sick of the fishing and he got sick of them, — so we all took the train back from Beverly, Ashton and his gay and festive literati booked for Brockton, my humble self for Harrisburg. As ill luck would have it, we met Faucon on the train and Ashton got wind of this nasty mess at the mills, which sent him off in a heavenly temper to Elmhurst — all of which I'm sorry for, as it unfits my gentle son-in-law for business. I happen to have an appointment with him and Whitelaw after dinner on very important business. Provoking, and quite like Ashton, to go off in the sulks simply to be out of the way."

"Out of the way?" Margaret repeated mechanically.

"Oh, there's nothing to be scared about," the Colonel hastened to say reassuringly, quite misunderstanding the expression of Margaret's face. "They can't do anything to him. The only trouble with Ashton is that he crops his temper too short for his own good. By going off in dudgeon when this thing first came up, he missed the chance of his life to stand in well with Brockton. I told him that in plain terms on the train this afternoon. Being one of the family, I felt I could speak frankly, mad or no mad. I said: 'Ashton Leverson, if you don't want to be popular, I do. I've got two children to support in my old age (more's the disgrace), and an uncertain legislature on my hands to

guide and advise. Sooner than have you go off home in the sulks, I'd rather have had you take a brass band and make a house-to-house canvass, saying it was all Dobson's fault, and that he'd be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.' That's what I said to him, and what good did it do? He just snorted at me and went away. You know what he is when he's roused."

Margaret, who did know very well, did not care to discuss the matter.

"I suppose we'll see you all out at Elmhurst as soon as the legislature adjourns?" she said to fill in.

"If it adjourns after doing the proper thing, which I reckon I can guarantee, you'll have us for the best part of the summer. When it's once through, filling this hole in the Senate, it can't last long. But, by the bye, about Reggie—he's got back from that European trip. The cost of the thing was something fearful—fifteen hundred if it's a cent. I've told him frankly I can't and won't pay it. He started off this morning to find you—said he wanted your advice. I think we may find him at the house when we get there."

With these words the Colonel's tone (chilled momentarily at the mention of Ashton Levenson's shortcomings) had recovered all its usual warmth. What the Colonel had accomplished by his warmth of manner was little short of marvellous, for he invariably used it with more or less definite purpose, as he was using it now.

With charming tact he had conveyed to Margaret, across the great gulf that separated them, the essential fact that she would be expected to straighten out Reggie in this his latest financial embarrassment. The money would be nominally borrowed of her, in reality of Ashton. The thing had been hinted at before, but this was the first time it had been forced home.

She was very tired and her heart was very full. She

could find no word of protest ; it was not even possible as yet for her to discuss the thing. She had a dim perception that all this was only a part of the great sacrifice of her life, which, in a fit of school-girl enthusiasm, she had entered into so unflinchingly two years before. And this was all that had come out of it.

It was getting late, and her rapid driving was an excuse for the silence into which she had fallen. She shivered slightly, as if she felt already the chill of the coming evening, but the Colonel did not notice it. He was busy with his own thoughts, filled just then with a knotty problem in Henderson County politics.

CHAPTER VI

THE LEVERSON CHESS-BOARD

"I TELL you, Whitelaw, he was altogether the coolest hand I've had to deal with in some time," Leverson said, exhaling a long, meditative puff of tobacco smoke into the perfectly still evening air, as he lolled on the balustrade of the Elmhurst veranda.

At his feet lay the beautifully kept Elmhurst gardens. Beyond, the valley of the lower Susquehanna stretched away in seemingly endless splendor into the glory of the west.

"He must have been deuced cool to have got the better of you in a game of bluff," Randal Whitelaw remarked with his habitual frankness, as he settled his head more comfortably into the cushions of his Morris chair. His whole attitude was lazy and indifferent. Only the proximity of Leverson's legs obliged him to keep a steady hand on a glass of iced whiskey and water which stood upon a small table at his side. Both men were, for the moment, completely unconscious of anything beyond the limit of their own desultory talk. Leverson, having finished his whiskey and water, was tossing dog biscuit to a retriever on the lawn below.

"There wasn't any game of bluff; and I didn't say he got the better of me," the master of Elmhurst retorted, without turning. "I had, as you know, nearly given up the idea of a secretary after my late experience. Well,

there was something about this young fellow which induced me to reconsider ; that's all."

"And that's a good deal, though the reason therefor is still somewhat vague. Why the frigidity of the young man (itself causeless) should produce this (for him) desirable result, is still beyond my poor comprehension," Whitelaw said languidly.

There was a certain ambiguity about Whitelaw's voice as there was at times about Whitelaw's face. Both were distinctly good of their kind ; the face clean shaven, regular, almost handsome ; the voice strong and of more depth than most American voices. And yet, both had, occasionally, a quality which, for lack of a better definition, might have been called ironical, though it was something less, and more. This quality was there now, though, fortunately for the continued harmony of the present tête-a-tête, Ashton Leverson did not recognize it.

"Why, it came about in this way," the latter said, unclasping his big brown hands from about his right knee for the purpose of shifting his cigar. "I got back from Beverly about four-forty, a trifle out of sorts ; found everybody gone, the front door wide open, and an absolutely strange young man seated comfortably on the sofa in my library reading my last copy of the *American Turf*,—and this, mind you, in a house with a floating population of two or three and twenty, including ten servants and four dogs."

"I can perfectly understand about the servants," Whitelaw said with recovered gravity. "The more you have the less likely they are to be on hand when wanted ; but I can't understand the absence of the dogs."

"Why, that's the crowning touch," Leverson said, dropping his feet to the level of the veranda floor and swinging round toward his companion ; "they weren't absent ! Don, the St. Bernard, you know, was stretched across my

best library rug, his mouth watering. Snap, the fox terrier, who has fits of not letting me come near the house when I'm a bit late, was sitting upon his hind legs begging for crackers, which this popular young man was giving him out of a plate apparently ordered for this purpose. The cocker spaniel was on the young man's lap, intercepting anything that came in his way. Oh, I tell you it was sublime!"

"I don't question it, only I don't quite see why an introduction of this kind should have led up to the gentleman's engagement as a confidential secretary."

"Now have a little patience and you'll see that and several other things. The curious part of this story hasn't even begun yet."

Leverson had talked himself into the best possible humor. His tall figure, which would have been manly had it been less burdened with surplus flesh, showed to its best advantage in a golf suit of rough tweed. His tanned, smooth-shaven face missed comeliness for the same reason, being too suggestive of *paté de foie gras*, reed birds, and champagne to be altogether pleasing. Nothing, however, save one of his nasty tempers, could entirely spoil the beauty of Leverson's brown eyes. Just at present, as he felt himself about to make an impression on the very unimpressionable Whitelaw, they were soft and warm like the eyes of a cow. They were, too, like that animal's, bereft of any indication of a sense of humor; as bereft of it as was his voice when he laughed at his own jokes,—a mechanical laugh without any ring of merriment in it. He was a good ten years younger than Whitelaw, who had been John Leverson's attorney in Ashton's school days, but of the two men on the Elmhurst veranda that night, the lawyer looked the younger.

"I'm all ears," the latter murmured absently, helping himself to more cracked ice.

"Well, you can imagine I was frothing," Leverson resumed. "With three steps I planted myself in front of him and opened up. 'What the devil are you doing here?' I began by way of a starter. 'Waiting to see Mr. Leverson on a mere matter of business,' he says calmly, getting to his feet. Faith, Whitelaw, but he was a daisy! Standing nearly my height, if not a trifle taller, and something of my build, too, when I'm in better training. However, I wasn't thinking of training then. 'Who sent you in here?' I went on. 'Your second man, for the butler's out. I told him he didn't know his business,' he answered in a flash. Well, that rather took the wind out of my sails, but I brought her round on another track. 'What's that you're reading?' I said, pointing to a book I'd caught sight of below the sporting paper on the sofa where he'd just left it. 'It's a volume of poems I found underneath the turf,' he said, grinning as if he'd said something funny, 'and mighty clever poems they are,' he added in a hasty way, as if he'd left that out by mistake. 'Can you tell me whose they are — I can't find the author's name?'"

"I think I've seen the volume," Whitelaw said, smiling pleasantly. "Red cover — Edition de Luxe?"

"Yes, — presentation copy, — but you've got to remember that this chap knew nothing about the thing, and that my name was purposely left off the fly-leaf. Whatever else he did, he took the thing on its merits. There's the book now — look for yourself," Leverson added aggressively, picking up a dainty little volume from the veranda table and shoving it toward his companion.

But Whitelaw had not come to Elmhurst to discuss Leverson's new secretary, much less Leverson's poetry. He had come on an important business matter concerning the Colonel, Leverson, and himself, about which he had had a right to demand a conference at his own office. He had not demanded it because he knew it was useless to do so:

Leverson was always too busy to attend to such things, and as an offset the lawyer could charge for his services. This being so, Leverson's prattle rather interested Whitelaw. If anything, he enjoyed his client's unconscious humor more than his whiskey and water, and certainly a great deal more than his poetry.

He turned over the leaves of the volume with a lazy smile playing about the corners of his mouth. His cigar, which he had left on the arm of his Morris chair, had gone out. Whitelaw, unlike Leverson, was a wretched smoker.

"Humph!" he muttered, "'Ode to Elmhurst's Broad Acres,' 'Down the Susquehanna on the Firefly' (mostly Firefly)." He smiled again this time to himself, and replaced the volume, conviction written on every line of his well-cut features.

"He *was* clever," he said. "By the bye, what's his name?"

"Thallon — Owen Thallon. Comes highly recommended by Hartley & Bald. Stunning letter from Bald, who isn't given to enthusiasms, as you know."

"Oh, yes; then I've seen him — this young fellow, I mean, in their office — casually, you know, for I don't remember ever having spoken to him. I had an idea he was one of their confidential men — and was pushing ahead. Curious he should take to — to this sort of thing."

"Oh, come! You lawyers think there's no road to fortune but through musty digests and worm-eaten reports. Besides, there's more ways than one for him to get ahead here, let me tell you. He's got a good deal in him — besides — besides —"

"Literary tastes?" Whitelaw suggested with suspicious gravity.

"Oh, I don't say that; but, however that may be, he did show presence of mind when things came to a crisis."

"Crisis? I don't think I quite understand."

"Well, it isn't too strong a word, though what brought it up was ridiculous enough. You see, I'd already touched the bell button on my library table before I'd said a word to the man. Well, who do you suppose answered?"

"My guesses would probably be wide of the mark."

"Why, no one else than my poor old nurse, Jane Kirk."

"Yes, I recollect her," Whitelaw said with increasing interest. "She was here with Miss Laurie at the time of your brother's death. Those two women kept him alive for days. They were so anxious to get word to Florida in time. You remember that day we got the telegram down on the Kissimee? It must have been four days old then. I believe it was her disappointment over that one thing that turned her head. She was sane enough before that, I reckon."

"Well, rather! And I've never believed since, till to-day, in her being really cracked; but if you'd seen her for a minute or two just then — well, never mind. You know she's always had the run of the house, and so I thought nothing of it when she came in as quiet as a lamb, and stood there waiting to be spoken to, — the only decently trained servant in the house, as I said to myself at the time. This young fellow, Thallon, was still standing a little to the right of the door she came in by, and enough behind the folds of that heavy portière to escape her notice at first; but just at the moment he turned toward her, the light from the window fell full on his face. She stood there a second or two, staring at him, her mouth fallen half open, gave a kind of gasp, clutched at the side of the door; then went over in a fit of helpless terror, striking at him as if to keep him away from her."

Leverson was certainly improving in his command of language. Whitelaw had even begun to have hopes of him as the coming literary star. The lawyer still lay at

full length in his Morris chair, but now his sharp eyes were fixed on his client's face like a pair of needles. His voice, however, was careless enough when he asked presently:—

“And didn't she say anything?”

“Oh, only perfect gibberish; the kind such people always mouth at you when they're off. Poor Jane; she's one of the few human beings who ever understood me; even when she's craziest, she worships me.”

“I don't doubt that,” Whitelaw said with a dryness beyond Leverson's ken. “I've had a good deal to do professionally with such people, I'm sorry to say. What odd notions they do get into their heads!”

“Don't they? Fancy poor Jane's taking this young fellow standing there, six feet in his shoes, for a woman.”

“For a woman?” Whitelaw looked politely incredulous.

“I mean every word of it. She kept repeating it over and over to herself; muttering under her breath, you know: ‘It's the woman again! It's the woman!’ And we argued with her for a good five minutes after we got her on the sofa before we could persuade her to say anything else. Of course, half a dozen of the other servants were in by this time.”

“Did she stay long like that?”

“No; oddest thing of all was she didn't! Came out of it as suddenly as she went in. Moment she saw she'd roused the house she seemed to want to hush the thing up. Aunt Catherine came in in the midst of it from her afternoon walk.”

“And how did Miss Laurie take the episode,—brand new clerk, crazy Jane, and all?”

“With her usual common sense,—not that she and her maid were especially useful. Long before they'd turned up, Thallon had brought order out of chaos. He really behaved very well. Turned his persuasive tongue on Jane,

you know. Assured her solemnly that whatever else he was, he wasn't that — that other woman."

"All this was before Miss Laurie and the others came in?"

"Oh, heavens, yes! We'd got her comparatively rational by that time, which was a job, I can tell you. Later, when we'd got her out of the room in charge of Aunt Catherine and her maid (who's afraid of nothing), I said to Thallon, 'Let's have a drink.' He said, 'All right,' and I took a liking to him from that minute, especially as he telephoned to that old fool, Lindley, to come up and quiet things. He did that while he was mixing a mint julep by a new receipt, the best of its kind I've ever struck. Oh, I tell you he's a hustler."

"So you engaged him on the strength of his skilful management of the insane? I've known clerical positions before now where it would have been a useful accomplishment," Whitelaw said, getting slowly out of his chair and taking a pace or two to stretch his legs.

He spoke absently and without looking at his client. There were moments when Randal Whitelaw played dangerously near the ragged edge with Leverson without apparently knowing it.

"I wish you'd let me tell my story in my own way," Leverson growled, eying his attorney with some distrust. "Besides his having been with Hartley & Bald, Thallon has a newspaper connection which will prove immensely valuable. I talked over some of my present work with him, and he thinks he knows where he can place it at considerably less cost to me than either Shaver or Wormley have ever suggested. Why, even 'Stray Bits of Verse' cost me seven hundred — as you happen to know."

"Yes, I know," Whitelaw said amiably. "I lost a good clerk through it when you drew on me for the money. He said he wouldn't open another special account for you

on the books of Whitelaw & Co., — not if he were skinned for refusing. I told him that you wanted it called 'A Leverson Poetry Account.' He seemed to especially object to that."

"Impudent young beggar! I wish I'd had the training of him! What did he mind that for?" Leverson asked, emitting ominous clouds of smoke like a volcano on the eve of eruption.

"Oh, I really didn't ask him," Whitelaw said, smothering a yawn. "I simply sacked him for impertinence."

Half an hour later, while Ashton Leverson was dressing for dinner, Randal Whitelaw still walked the west veranda with that peculiarly noiseless tread of his which made some people nervous. For once in his life he had found some food for thought in Leverson's remarks, and to judge from his expression it did not agree with him.

He presently threw away the stump of his cigar, which he found he had been chewing, and lit a fresh one to take the taste away. Then he replenished his glass from the decanter on the table, and, having drained it again at a swallow, stood there abstractedly studying its emptiness in the lamplight which came out through the library door. All these things were very unlike Randal Whitelaw. It was not until he heard the sound of rapidly moving wheels upon the gravel and recognized the voices of Mrs. Leverson and the Colonel in the front hall, that he roused himself from his abstraction.

"It's all damned nonsense," he said to himself impatiently. "I'm in my dotage to have even thought of it," and thus swearing softly at his own stupidity, he turned and went in.

CHAPTER VII

THE FITNESS OF THINGS

LEAVING the Colonel to his own devices, which might be relied upon to provide for his material comfort, Margaret ran upstairs in quest of Ashton.

Since her meeting with the Colonel, a realizing sense of how her husband was likely to regard her afternoon's work had replaced the unquestioning confidence with which she had left the Doctor's office three hours before.

Her father's description of Ashton's return to Brockton had struck her with all the force of the unexpected, for two years of marriage with Ashton Levenson had not enabled her to find a rule small enough to measure him by. Her imperfect knowledge of life, drawn almost entirely from books, was no aid in reading such a character, having left her still capable of imputing motives to those about her, which under similar circumstances would have formed the springs of her own action.

This miserable, oppressive doubt which was closing in about her seemed just then the one thing she could not bear. Her whole nature called aloud for clearer comprehension. It was with almost a sense of relief that she tapped lightly on Levenson's dressing-room door, and noted from the tone in which he said, "Come in," that he was alone and perfectly aware who was on the other side of the oak panel.

"I am sorry to be late," she said, making an effort at her usual frank tone, though unable to entirely suppress the troubled look in her eyes. "If I had only known you

were back so much earlier than you expected to be, I might have met you in town and saved myself hours of worry. I only heard of your return from the Colonel when I picked him up at the station half an hour ago."

"Perhaps it's quite as well," Leverson remarked without turning from his dressing-table, nor pausing in the careful adjustment of his black necktie. "I understand you've been doing some electioneering in the Colonel's interest, and I might have interfered with it if I'd been consulted."

"Electioneering?"

She put the question in utter bewilderment, and added with absolute honesty:—

"I don't—I really don't understand you."

"You have certainly utterly failed to understand your position as my wife, or you would not have spent the afternoon in gossiping with that idiot Lindley about my affairs, nor in making spectacular visits to Brockton slums to consolidate the Gilbreed vote," Leverson remarked, turning at last and giving her the full benefit of a pair of angry brown eyes.

The Colonel's appeal to him that afternoon had suggested the use of the word "electioneering." He had used it freely on the Colonel himself, when he had repudiated his suggestion, and practically told him to mind his own business; but then, it had not annoyed the Colonel in the least, and to annoy some one was just then absolutely necessary for Leverson's comfort.

And he had succeeded (such is the adaptability of woman to our daily needs) beyond his most sanguine expectations. She had come toward him at her entrance, with her habitual freedom of movement, which had a lingering suggestion of the child about it and yet was not unwomanly. Leverson, who was not by nature in the least blind to feminine attractions, might have noticed at another time the graceful little movement of the firm white hand on its

beautifully modelled wrist, which, at her first words, she had laid for an instant on his arm. Margaret Levenson could say so much with her hands.

"I would like very much to know who asserts I have done either," she said, as she recovered herself, his injustice throwing her on the defensive. "I called in the first place to ask the Doctor if I could be of any use to him, though it is also true that I asked him if the management of the mill could in any way be responsible for the accident. I thought it was the very thing you would want to know. I thought I should try to take your place at such a critical moment during your absence."

The gleam of resentment, which an instant before had shot from those wide, frank eyes of hers, had died out again. She had drawn a step farther away and was leaning listlessly on the back of Levenson's lounging chair, her fingers playing nervously with the buttons of its upholstery. And it took a good deal to make Margaret Levenson nervous.

"I don't see how you can question my purpose in going there," she went on wearily, the faintest echo of wistfulness in the voice which a word from him would have turned to anxious pleading. "I have neither gossiped about you nor wished to do anything spectacular. It is true the Doctor misunderstood my position for a single moment, but—but—he ended by completely understanding me. He said—"

"If you mean that he approved of the whole performance, you're quite right," Levenson retorted, too angry now to notice her admission. "He held you up as a charming example of public spirit and wifely devotion, when I cut him short with the reminder that he was here to adjust Jane Kirk's mental balance and not mine, and that I was perfectly capable of appreciating my wife's noble qualities without any assistance from him."

Levenson's voice had risen as it was very apt to do at such moments. When angry he had no objection to taking any

one, even the servants, into his confidence. His heavy throat, which had a strangled look within the grip of his stiff white collar, was even a deeper red than usual. He was savagely twisting a large white silk handkerchief into unrecognizable tatters between his great brown hands, as if he were wringing the Doctor's neck. To any one whom he had no power to injure, he would have looked inexpressibly funny as he stood there like some dangerous animal, but there were several hundred men and women not in that happy category, and Margaret was one of them. Yet though she drew back, it was not from fear.

"Was that all you said to him?" she asked in a voice which sounded strangely distant.

"More than that I naturally couldn't say as your interview with him was, apparently, not of his seeking. He may be underbred, but there's a limit even to his vulgarity."

She flushed hotly now in her turn and then grew deadly pale. To him this little episode in his married life was like a great many others which had preceded it since, on their first taking up life at Elmhurst, he had discovered that one could not go on forever being the impassioned lover of a woman who had frankly told him before her engagement that she could not love him in that way.

To her it marked a period in their relationship. Though she had not always been patient under his growing discontent, she had striven loyally to make amends by self-abnegation, almost by self-effacement in little things, for the great wrong she believed she had done him in marrying him. She had never reminded him by so much as a look of the time when he had urged their union as the one essential of his life.

As is the well-worn usage of a certain type of the ardent lover, he had given her to understand in those early days, which seemed so far away now, that his going to the devil was the absolutely certain penalty of her refusal. If at

the age of eighteen she had not discovered that marriage, whether viewed as a sacrament or a contract, has no inherent power to prevent either party thereto from going to the devil if so minded, she might, perhaps, have been forgiven the oversight, in view of her having learned so much since,—among other things, that anything which Ashton Leverson wanted, especially if difficult to get, was always, for the moment, the one essential of his life. The only variety lay in the fact that at different periods he wanted different things.

He had just awakened her, somewhat rudely, to the all-important fact that he no longer wanted *her*. What she had meant for loyalty he had resented as impertinent interference.

But if in her pride she felt abashed, humbled, humiliated, his power to hurt her ended there. If she had loved him, the whole trend of that one small moment of their lives would have been so different. Then the words he had just used might have struck her down, but she would have rallied and gone on loving as women will; now they only cut her adrift from him.

Her hands dropped to her sides and she drew herself up proudly.

"You have a perfect right to forbid my discussing any affair of yours." She began slowly, for even in her distress she felt she must make this admission clear to him. "But beyond that I cannot see that you have any right to go, and you would not go beyond it now if you were not angry. My maintaining some vestige of my old friendship for the Doctor is something much more important to me than to him; something I cannot be asked to give up. So with these poor people; they may be shiftless, grasping, ungrateful,—anything you like. They may have given reason enough for complaint. I might agree with you in condemning them in many things, but the one

thing I cannot do is to ignore them — if I am to go on living here.”

Leverson looked at her in absolute bewilderment. He had the reputation of being easy-going, and, in a way, rather liberal with his hands. If Whitelaw, at a Directors' Meeting, reported to him that there would be a row if an advance was not agreed to, he invariably voted for the advance. There were five Directors in the management of the Leverson Corporation, so, if he was outvoted, it was certainly not his fault. At such times he usually went out of town, feeling justified in leaving his coadjutors to fight it out, not because he was afraid of a row, but because that kind of a row interfered with his amusements. Whitelaw, as Vice-president of the Company, never had the slightest objection to do anything in the Leverson interest, because, as the President had the satisfaction of knowing, the Leverson interest was his; besides which, Whitelaw had the reputation of being a heartless brute, so he had nothing to lose.

And now a girl of twenty calmly informed him that she proposed maintaining relations with these people whether he liked it or not, — relations which at some critical moment might jeopardize the interests of three million dollars worth of stock. Leverson could not, in reason, be expected to argue the matter, but he put this view of the fitness of things before his misguided wife in very forceful language. If he allowed her to take up district visiting among the Brockton mill-hands, she could do so only as his wife, and every mother's son of them would regard her as his agent and go-between. Under the circumstances she had better reconsider whether or not he had a right to forbid it. He certainly did forbid it, — right or no right. In charity he would suppose the idea would never have entered her head if it had not been for Lindley, — a very worthy person, no doubt, when kept in his proper place, but overfond of

posing and with a vulgar longing for such notoriety as would accrue to him from having Mrs. Levenson as an assistant in running the Brockton tenements. The idea was disgusting, to say the least of it.

He was so absorbed by the force of his own words, that he did not notice the misery written in her face, or mistook it for proper contrition and wifely submission. Only at his last words her shapely head went up again. She waved aside all the rest of it as of no importance beside that.

"How dare you call him vulgar," she cried passionately, "or imply that I have been so in going to him! You know — no one better — how old and tried a friend he is. You know I would never have gone to him had I not been sure of his loyalty!"

"Do you refer to his loyalty to me?" Levenson asked politely, adjusting his cuffs. He had cooled rapidly as he saw the hot color mounting to her face; he had freed his mind, gained a complete victory, was by her own admission absolutely in the right. His last reference to the Doctor was almost playful. Lindley had notoriously opposed him on one or two matters of public concern, and it had come to Levenson's ears that he had criticised "Stray Bits of Verse."

To Margaret differences of opinion on such matters seemed compatible with honorable and even friendly treatment. She had known the Doctor capable of both, but to Levenson such heresy was unforgivable. He would have taken away the Elmhurst patronage from Lindley long before, save that he knew he risked his life if he employed Smalls. Levenson never permitted pique to interfere with his personal comfort, much less safety. He had reason to believe that there was something serious the matter with his liver, and an open quarrel with Lindley might mean life or death to him. Levenson was physically afraid of nobody, but he was dreadfully afraid of his own liver.

"I refer to his loyalty to truth and to your true interests," Margaret went on gravely. "I knew he would never sanction my visiting your working people if he thought it could prejudice your interests."

"You'll pardon me if I think I'm the best judge of that," Levenson said quite mollified, he was so obviously in the right.

"You were not here to judge, and I thought I was helping you," she said more slowly still, because of the pressure at her throat, and then with a little broken cry and a sudden passionate movement of those expressive hands: "Oh, you might have known! You might have known!"

"Oh, come! don't be hysterical, Madge," he broke in half impatiently, half kindly, for his burst of temper had spent itself, and his complete triumph was in itself most soothing. "If you only wouldn't do such aggravating things, we'd got on so much better. You know I've always wanted to get on. Come, run along and dress for dinner."

There was, perhaps, some lingering touch of real tenderness under his careless words, but it had come too late. In choking back a woman's tears, so rare with her, she had stifled her keenest longing for appreciation and understanding. Yet he was very far from guessing it as in silence she passed on into her own rooms, and closed the door behind her.

Left in possession of the field, he began humming an air from some light opera, always a sign with Levenson that he was entirely satisfied with the situation. As for her, she was already taking up the little round of trivialities which must be gone through with, even when we have just discovered that life is hardly worth living. If her obligation to dress for dinner inside the next twenty minutes did not quite absorb her thoughts, its accomplishment seemed likely to absorb every moment of that space of time.

Margaret found her maid waiting for her in her own room, and had every reason to believe she had overheard a large portion of Levenson's pithy remarks. After the manner of her kind, her devoted attendant succeeded in making this perfectly plain by a fervid show of sympathy expressed through the medium of moist eyes and indignant glances toward the closed door of Levenson's dressing room, through which a bar or two from "El Capitaine" was still audible.

It was the one thing needed to complete poor Margaret's humiliation. Finding the girl perfectly useless, she dismissed her with an unaccustomed sharpness which hurt Alice's feelings without being any relief to her own.

Once alone, it came upon her in a great wave of feeling how miserably petty, how contemptible, it all was. She fought against it through sheer fear of admitting it, even to herself, as she had fought against it scores of times before.

But to-night the voice of revolt refused to be silenced. It seemed to her as if every one of the scores of costly trifles, which littered the walls and furniture of the beautiful room, was pointing a malicious forefinger at her in sneering reminder that it had been bought with Levenson money and must be loyal to the breed. She too had been bought with Levenson money, but they naturally looked down upon her; *her* loyalty had been questioned!

By a great effort she shut them out, forcing her memory to recall the scene of that afternoon in very self-defence; the picture of a misery so much more tangible to sight and touch than hers, and yet, as it seemed to her, so much easier to bear.

For the moment, at least, she conquered. No one who had seen her descend the wide oak staircase half an hour later would have imagined that she had just closed one chapter in her life and was beginning another.

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER FEAST

It was Randal Whitelaw who happened to be crossing the hall as Margaret reached the foot of the stairs. She met him with a murmured apology for not having been on hand to receive him before, though his being there was distinctly a matter of business.

Inwardly she felt as if her apologetic attitude toward the Leverson world was becoming chronic ; as if she even owed it some amends for having been born at all ; outwardly she was merely courteous, her pride keeping her within the bounds of reason and common sense.

Whitelaw, who could be short enough in his dealings with his own sex, had too much Southern blood in his veins to lack either tact or delicacy where women were concerned, least of all with the girl to whom he was now speaking. He ignored the apology itself ; indeed, his first words were an assurance that no apology was necessary.

"It's rather hard on you, Mrs. Leverson," he began, smiling, "that half the meetings of our honorable board are held nowadays at Elmhurst. You might almost as well live in Brockton. We bring such an odor of the shop along with us, and our conversation, even at table, is so suggestive of oil and varnish. Please forgive us this once more ; I've reason to believe it won't last much longer."

"That is the least I can do, as you are all here for Ashton's convenience," she said with an answering smile which thanked him for his kindness, "and besides, it

means my getting a glimpse of Mr. Doniphan, which is a rarer pleasure than it ought to be."

"He's just arrived," Whitelaw nodded comprehensively, not in the least jealous of Mobray Doniphan, who was ten years his senior and looked twenty. "I suppose," he went on, "we should have gathered just the same if Ashton had called the meeting in the heart of Africa. I remember once he, Doniphan, and I were down at Currituck duck shooting, when a telegram came from McIntyre reminding us there was a Quarterly Meeting on the tenth. Two of us supposed of course we were booked for home, but your marvellous husband was resourceful as usual. We telegraphed McIntyre to bring down the accounts, notified the minority of the board, held the meeting in Leverson's duck boat, passed the accounts, and declared a dividend. Didn't we, Mr. Doniphan?"

They had turned and entered the long drawing-room, already occupied by Leverson himself and the balance of those fortunate persons about to partake of the Leverson manna. To one of these, who did not look as grateful for the privilege as he should have done, Whitelaw had addressed that last remark of his.

With some little difficulty Mobray Doniphan detached himself from the Colonel and came toward them, his clean-shaven face, which was thin almost to emaciation, lighting up wonderfully as he took the girl's hand between his own bony fingers and held it there for an instant.

He would have impressed a stranger as an odd little man, the top of whose large head reached only to Margaret's eyes. His badly cut clothes hung on rather than fitted his slight figure, and his whole personality was only redeemed from repulsive ugliness by a pair of brilliant, very expressive eyes.

He had the slight stoop of the habitual reader but not the pallor, for he was one of those fortunate human beings

who are able to choose their own path in life; and in the face of that distinctly American dogma that no matter how much money a man may inherit he is bound to spend his life in trying to make more, he had chosen the life of a country gentleman and a student, accomplishing in the former capacity as well as in the latter the work of half a dozen men.

Yet a time had come, twelve years back, when he had not found it possible to continue a deeply engrossed intellectual life and maintain an active sympathy for others in the world outside. When the choice had come, he had chosen the latter without any blowing of trumpets. The world only knew that his reputation as a pamphleteer was not what it had been, though his name still appeared and carried weight. Brockton meanwhile had learned to know him better without suspecting any sacrifice.

Mobray Doniphan's relationship with Margaret Leverson was a much closer one than his connection with the Gilbreeds, as Mr. Faucon's brother-in-law, would have accounted for. During the diverting precocity of her tenth year he had taught the child Latin grammar for the same reason that he had taught her to play chess,—because it amused him; when she was eighteen, he had suddenly waked to the fact that she had a mind well worth cultivating, but shortly afterwards her engagement to Leverson had spoiled everything from Mobray Doniphan's point of view.

This evening, as he stood there chatting with her and the attentive Whitelaw, he was recalling again that day, something over two years ago, when she had told him about her engagement; told him in that grave manner of hers without a touch of girlish embarrassment. They had been reading Xenophon,—the girl had taken to Greek with a quickness of perception which had secretly delighted even Mobray Doniphan, the fastidious,—and

had reached the middle of the first book when she imparted this, to him, unpalatable piece of news. He had made no comment, — only put his bookmark between the pages when they stopped that afternoon, and, as he had quite expected, they never got much farther.

With his usual shrewdness he made a pretty accurate guess what had happened since, though all the time he was talking delightful nonsense to her as they followed Levenson and Miss Laurie into the dining room. Whitelaw and the Colonel straggled in behind in company with Shaver and Wormly, the literary hangers-on, both somewhat awed in the presence of the genuine star, and therefore, for once, decently silent.

Doniphan, who, as above noted, could talk very well about one thing and think about another, was presently seated at Margaret's right, and opposite Miss Laurie, with whom he began to exchange compliments and gossip which, in the estimation of the hangers-on, belied his reputation.

Miss Laurie, speaking generally, was of the Dresden china order of old ladies, so delicate as to seem almost fragile, as she sat there in a cloud of soft silk and lace, her white hair and pink-and-white complexion making more noticeable a pair of sharp black eyes.

No one to have seen her just then could have imagined that she came of a race of men who, no farther back than her own middle age, had worked with their hands. No one to have heard her voice, as she went on chatting with Doniphan in one of her most gracious moods, would have believed her anything but a born lady. No other country in the world could have produced such a woman with such a past.

But she was not as clever as Doniphan at keeping up by-play. Whitelaw, who was watching her with something more than his usual careless interest, noticed that the sharp

black eyes wandered at times from Doniphan to where Levenson sat at the head of the table in rather loud talk with the Colonel. Levenson was bragging of the way he had handled the *Firefly* in a bit of a breeze that morning off North Point in the Chesapeake, and bragging was a healthy sign with Levenson.

It was easy to see that Miss Laurie worshipped her nephew, but that was no news to Whitelaw, and would not have repaid such a careful study as he was just then giving the piece of Dresden china on his right.

"I suppose this new protégé of Ashton's is booked to put poor McIntyre's nose out of joint," the lawyer remarked to this costly article, as soon as Mobray Doniphan had relaxed his conversational hold upon it and had turned to Margaret. "Without wishing in the least to detract from Ashton's high estimate of him, I suppose I may be allowed to commiserate McIntyre."

If he had wanted to attract those sharp eyes in his direction, Whitelaw had made no mistake in his selection of a topic. They were already turned upon him, sparkling under the soft lamplight which fell full upon her face, like two pieces of cut jet.

"Have you seen him yet?" she asked in the terse, crisp way peculiar to her.

"Unfortunately, no. He'd gone when I got here this afternoon, but I understand from Ashton he's to be at the meeting this evening. I suppose he wants to break him in on something besides literature. It seems he's a paragon of all-round usefulness. I know something about him from having seen him in Bald's Harrisburg office. A clever fellow enough, from all I hear."

"Entirely too clever, from all I've seen."

Miss Laurie made this comment with something more than her usual crispness. She laid down her spoon without having finished her soup. Morgan was filling her

glass with some of that mild old sherry which was Miss Laurie's favorite tipple. Whitelaw waited for him to move on before he remarked with some amusement:—

"You forget you haven't told me yet what you have seen."

"For the matter of that, you haven't told me what you've heard."

Whitelaw laughed outright. It was so characteristic of her that he was to get nothing out of her without paying for it. That he already possessed Leverson's account of Thallon's advent that afternoon was quite beside the question; it only enhanced his appreciation of Miss Laurie's caution.

"I'm rather afraid we've neither of us anything of much value to exchange," he went on in the same light tone; and then added,—with one of his sudden changes of manner,—“but I'm in a position where I imagine I might add considerably to my knowledge of this young gentleman's past history, and on Ashton's account I may take the trouble to do it.”

At five and seventy hands which have finished their work in the world are apt to tremble somewhat, whether the work itself may be looked back upon with unmixed satisfaction or not.

If Whitelaw noticed that Miss Laurie spilled a drop or two of her fine old wine as she set down her glass, he was only sorry because these little accidents are embarrassing to old people.

She was not looking at him just then, but had let her eyes wander back to Leverson's face with that soft look in them which came there for no one else. With him Miss Laurie's native shrewdness had, from the beginning of things, somehow deserted her. With him she had made no bargain. She had labored for him, striven for him, schemed for him, and had asked nothing from him in

return. Oddly enough she had got more out of him than might have been expected. There was no question but what Levenson loved her more than he loved any other human being save himself. His Aunt Catherine had always seemed to Levenson the one woman with a definite and worthy object in life.

She had lived up to this estimate of her by loving him well enough to ruin him a dozen times over; perhaps she was realizing that now as she never had before.

Her snappy black eyes came back to her left-hand neighbor, not directly, but by a short detour, which carried them across the long, wainscoted dining room, with its dark red walls and ceiling of panelled oak; across the square table brilliant with spotless damask and the sparkle of shining glass and silver. On the whole, it was a very fair inheritance, this which John Levenson had earned by thirty years of hard labor, and which had come to Ashton without the turning of a hand. Miss Laurie, with a fastidiousness which had come to her from Heaven knows where, had loved the money, not for what it was, but for what it brought. She had had small sympathy with the rougher, coarser man who had made it, while every fibre of her being had gone out to the handsome, wilful boy whose birth had cost Ann Levenson her life in that far-away time of poverty and struggle.

It is quite possible that Whitelaw, versed as he was in the Levenson history, had followed closely enough the trend of Miss Laurie's thoughts, though as he met her eyes again, he only raised his eyebrows slightly, as if in polite inquiry.

"I wouldn't do it," she said abruptly, as if answering the look. "It can do no good."

"Pardon me! I thought from the way you spoke just now, you agreed with me it might."

"Not at all! I said nothing against the boy, except his

having too much brains be considered a blemish. You say yourself he comes well recommended, so he's probably not a defaulter. My disliking him personally is not a matter of great importance. As I understand it, Ashton's not engaged him to do up my back hair."

Whitelaw laughed.

"Nevertheless, you do dislike him, and as a rule, Miss Laurie, you have some reason for your dislikes."

"There you're entirely wrong. There are even times when I dislike *you*, though I'm sure I don't know why."

"I know! It's because I'm so persistent."

"Perhaps. I shall certainly dislike you if you persist in your present purpose. I hardly think it necessary to institute an inquisition into the past history of one's servants beyond the usual recommendations. Very frequently in this disordered household we have servants whom I personally dislike. I don't worry myself about them. I'm merely glad to see them go, which they usually do at the end of the month. This boy struck me as rather too cool for his place, — even to the verge of impertinence. There are times when Ashton, with his light-hearted kindliness, is too familiar with his dependents, and so he didn't notice it, but he will all in good time — until then, let it rest."

"With all my heart," Whitelaw answered much amused, and implying a promise he had no intention of keeping for the sake of winding up a topic, which the first pause in the general chatter might make common property. "By the way, speaking of servants, I was sorry to hear about poor Jane Kirk. Ashton tells me she's had another one of her attacks?"

Here Margaret, at the moment released by Doniphan from his conversational grip, glanced across the table as Whitelaw put the question to Miss Laurie.

"Well, Ashton exaggerated, as usual, where Jane's miseries are concerned," the old lady hastened to reassure

him. "We all know Jane's weak points. She can't bear new faces, and of course the dear fellow was reckless enough to call her into the study with this latest waif-and-stray jumping up from the sofa like a jack-in-the-box. Of course, she had a relapse, but she was all right in an hour, though I shall take care that no one but Celeste and I see her for a day or two. All she wants is quiet."

"I'm very glad to hear it was not more serious," Margaret said, addressing Miss Laurie. "Alice only told me of it a few moments before dinner, and I had no chance to ask questions."

"She naturally couldn't have told you before, as you were not here," Miss Laurie remarked with an iciness of manner calculated to remind the lady of the house how completely she had failed to qualify in the domestic field. It was quite as much to prevent Margaret's answer, as with any intention of coming to her rescue, that Mobray Doniphan swung himself into the breach, while he made another of his clear deductions as to the relationship between these two ladies.

As he ran on easily through a range of subjects light as gossamer, he was saying to himself that even this girl, who had managed the cramped Gilbreed income with no small skill, might well be nonplussed at the problems which confronted her on an income of eighty thousand a year coupled with an expenditure of a hundred thousand; if for no other reason, that she had no control over either.

It was common gossip that Ashton dismissed three-quarters of the Elmhurst servants on an average of once a month. Morgan, who stood like a rock between Elmhurst and absolute chaos, was also dismissed frequently; but never went, because his ability at taking the other servants' places saved Leverson any inconvenience, and because he loved Leverson well enough to do it.

There was no question about it, Leverson was capable

of inspiring affection. A great many people upon whom he trampled ruthlessly with those clumsy feet of his picked themselves up in the dust, and crawled after him so as to be on hand when wanted. But the girl seated next him on his left had not crawled yet, — Mobray Doniphan could see that clearly enough by merely glancing at her, and (although he could foresee no possible good which could accrue to her in the hopeless struggle) he felt a sense of keen elation that she had not.

This partisanship on Doniphan's part did not prevent his being delightfully chatty with Levenson. At such seasons, when he felt he had more reasons than usual to despise him, he was apt to draw Levenson out about his literary work. It was a relief to his feelings to see Whitelaw grinning on the opposite side of the table.

"They tell me you've got to the end of the second chapter — going so well you've had to hire an extra stenographer," he was saying pleasantly, as Morgan distributed coffee and cigars. "Don't forget, though, you can carry mental application too far — never work more than five hours on a stretch, and have some mercy on your amanuensis."

"Oh, you needn't worry about him," Levenson laughed. "I haven't even set him to work yet. You see Shaver and Wormly here are going to desert me to-morrow, — called away to the city, don't you know, — which leaves me a trifle short-handed. I dare say I shall be able to make something of this new fellow. He's coming to-night, so you can judge for yourself."

The hangers-on, who had been warmly seconding the small man's efforts, here exchanged glances and relapsed into pained silence. They had had no intention of being called away so soon, and infinitely preferred Elmhurst to Philadelphia, where their board cost them seven dollars a week. Doniphan, who easily grasped the situation, would

not have been at all surprised if he had caught Shaver putting some extra cigars in his pocket against a rainy day.

Nothing of the kind happened, however, at least, before dinner came to an end, and Ashton solemnly conducted the four trustees of the vast Leverton interests into his private study.

For the rest, — Miss Laurie disappeared upstairs; Margaret wandered out into the garden, where the damp night air was creeping up from the river; Shaver and Wormly sought consolation in the billiard room; and Morgan busied himself over the deserted table. Even he only lingered there to lock up the wine and cigars.

CHAPTER IX

A MERE MATTER OF BUSINESS

"If you'll allow me, I'll take one of these 'Regalias,'" Doniphan remarked as he helped himself to his second cigar from a box on Leverson's writing-table. "I'm told we've something before us to-night rather more important than the usual cut-and-dried formulas of a Quarterly Meeting, and I, for one, always think better with a piece of good tobacco between my teeth—eh, Colonel?"

The Colonel, who, as a connection by marriage, had already helped himself out of the same box without any formality, grinned amiably and sank into the nearest comfortable chair.

Two lesser lights in the Leverson financial world had risen respectfully on the entrance of the four gentlemen. McIntyre and Thallon had reached Elmhurst by appointment half an hour before, and spent the interval in listening to the sounds of feasting which reached them faintly from the next room, the older clerk glaring savagely at the newcomer, the latter in blissful unconsciousness of his rival's presence.

Leverson, on his entrance, had taken no notice of McIntyre, and had merely glanced at Thallon with languid curiosity, as if he were some peculiar species of animal suitable for a private collection, just sent in on approbation.

The object of this attention, considering his employer's intimacy of that afternoon, may have felt some natural disappointment at its lack of warmth, but if he did he

utterly failed to show it. Leverson, who rarely extended the small courtesies of life to his inferiors, had neither asked him to be reseated nor introduced him to a soul. The first omission Thallon rectified himself, while the Colonel, upon whom awkwardness of this kind grated disagreeably, rectified the second by pleasantly chatting with him as if he had known him half a lifetime.

Whitelaw watched these two in amused silence, while Doniphan ensconced himself beside McIntyre — a shabby little man whom no one would have recognized as the fifth Director of the great Leverson Corporation, with the Casting Vote in its august councils; the Casting Vote was always kept shabby on purpose.

There was a certain congruity between the room in which these six men had congregated and its owner — owner likewise of the Casting Vote, and of all things visible and invisible in the Leverson world, but of nothing more typically Leverson than the space enclosed within these four walls.

It was a room which had something of a library about it, without containing a dozen books of any literary value; something of the office, without containing any business papers save those which McIntyre had just brought with him, and a great deal of the lumber room, without containing anything beyond its furniture for which anybody would have given a cent. No — there we do it wrong; there was a steel engraving of a horse-race on one wall, with a lithograph of a lady in pink tights opposite, which doubtless would have found eager bidders at a forced sale.

A confused mass of periodicals, largely of a sporting character, which, together with newspapers and scraps of blotted manuscript, littered the table and even a portion of the floor, may have been intended to convey an atmosphere of literary toil; an effect, however, somewhat marred by an empty gun-rack in one corner, a decoration of fish-

ing tackle over the mantel, upon which rested an unfinished model of a yacht, eked out at either end by cigar boxes in various stages of emptiness.

Leverson, who hated nothing more than a Directors' Meeting, was trying to get Whitelaw interested in the model by way of a respite, but his attorney brought him back to the cares of life with kindly firmness.

"Now, gentlemen, the Permanent Chairman wants to call this meeting to order," he began pleasantly, pulling Leverson back into his swivel chair and jerking his own to within nudging distance of the Permanent Chairman's ribs.

"I call the meeting to order," that functionary repeated with his eyes on the model.

"It not being a regular Quarterly Meeting, the reading of the minutes of the last meeting might, I should say, be omitted," Whitelaw went on.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't give us that drivel!" Leverson put in with sudden attention. "Here, McIntyre; you enter it on record that it was all read and approved."

"If I'm to sign the thing as Secretary of this board, I should like to have it a trifle more regular than that," the Colonel remarked, smiling. "Why not say 'reading dispensed with'—that's as short and has the advantage of being true."

This love of truth on the Colonel's part seemed to delight Doniphan. He relinquished a volume of Leverson's poems which he had found on a side table to laugh at the pleasantry. It seemed to him even funnier than the poems.

"Having disposed of that point," Whitelaw went on calmly, "it strikes me it would be well, in the interests of those not at the last special meeting, for the Colonel to give some account of a rather delicate negotiation which he has been carrying on with parties representing other concerns in our own line of business."

"In short, 'The Combine,'" Leverson put in tersely.

"It is moved, seconded, and carried," Whitelaw continued, speaking for the Chair (which at that moment was busy relighting its cigar), "that Colonel Gilbreed be requested to make this report in writing."

"Have you got that down?" Doniphan asked of the industrious McIntyre who was busily writing.

The Casting Vote tried hard to divide his attention between this last remark and a pad of manila paper on his knee. He paused abruptly, looked up from his work reproachfully, moistened the end of his pencil, his lips moving painfully. Doniphan could see them spelling out — r-e-q-u-e-s-t-e-d.

"I have it in shorthand, Mr. Doniphan," Thallon said with the calmness of a tried reporter.

"Of course he has," Leverson snorted contemptuously. "For God's sake, McIntyre, hand your papers over to Mr. Thallon. He hasn't been here an hour yet, and he knows more of your business than you've learned in two years."

The Centre of all things, the Judge of all things, was lolling comfortably in its swivel chair as it emitted this decree. Its evening clothes fitted it to a nicety; its shirt bosom had a beautiful curve in it, suggestive of a bellying sail; about its sacred person there rose a blue cloud of smoke like some appropriate incense. Thallon, not quite certain whether this eminently just decision had turned him into a Casting Vote or not, was, nevertheless, satisfied that the honor was merely a question of time. He had certainly accomplished something in his first six hours' acquaintance with Ashton Leverson; the use of the prefix before his own name had not escaped him; coming on top of Leverson's late reception of him, it meant a good deal. He modestly took the papers which were shoved across the table at him by the now almost tearful McIntyre, the gratified smile lurking about the corners of his mouth

not being lost on Doniphan. At that moment the wicked old man took one of his violent dislikes to this paragon of usefulness.

"You'll find my written report somewhere among that stuff," the Colonel was saying affably to the new favorite.

Thallon rose and handed him the desired document without speaking, Leverson making a mental note that here was a man who could do a thing without talking about it, while even Whitelaw observed with a sensation akin to admiration how perfectly familiar he seemed already, not only with the name of every man present, but with his proper place on the Leverson chess-board; decidedly a fellow who might be very useful—or very dangerous.

"I'm not going to read the whole of this thing," the Colonel remarked, slowly turning over the leaves of a document comprising thirty or forty type-written pages. "It's written, of course, to be spread upon the record, but I can give you the gist of the matter in two or three dozen words. Banks, the man who has got the options on one or two of the Western car works, and Foster, who has been working New England, have got their share of the goods ready for delivery. They met our man, Higgins, in Harrisburg last week, and either through buying controlling interests in the stocks, or in out-and-out options on the properties, he could account for all but three of the Pennsylvania plants. Now mark this clearly, gentlemen, for this is where, in my humble opinion, the fun comes in; and if you don't pat me on the back when I've finished, why, I've overestimated my value to this concern—that's all. Of these three plants, one at Pittsburg is a cramped concern, with something like fifty thousand dollars capital; the second—at Spring Valley—is an investment of about two hundred and fifty thousand, and a very poor investment at that. The third, *and the only one of any importance outside of*

The Combine to-day, is the three-million-dollar plant of the Levenson Car Company."

The Colonel, one of the best stump speakers in the state of Pennsylvania, here came to one of his impressive pauses. Doniphan, who sat with his legs lightly crossed, blowing out little rings of smoke which made halos just above Levenson's head, was the only perfectly cool man in the room. Even the imperturbable Whitelaw had that peculiar glitter of the eyes of a significance Doniphan knew only too well. He had seen the same look in those of a Jew pedler in the throes of a bargain, the successful consummation of which meant a profit of three hundred per cent.

Whitelaw was the first to break a silence which had lasted long enough to be distinctly noticeable.

"To a certain extent, of course, we were prepared for this," he began slowly. "Levenson and I especially, as I have consulted freely with the Colonel whenever the counsel of the Company might be expected to give an opinion. But I want to say here, that I had no conception he had carried the negotiation to such a delicate point. There is no question but that his management of this vital matter has been masterly, but I trust he won't misunderstand me if I express a hope that he has not made the point *too* fine. To put the thing tersely, Colonel, have you got a definite offer?"

"One, I think, which can hardly fail to meet the approval of every gentleman present," the Colonel said, tapping his little roll of manuscript with a large forefinger as if he were punctuating his own weighty words, "to all intents and purposes, and within anything like reason, we have the incorporators of this new enterprise completely at our mercy. They've simply got to have the Levenson plant or make a fizzle of their Eastern business; in the West, of course, they can't control as yet, though they will in time,

but here every cent they pay us over and above intrinsic value, they will get back ten times over in dealing with the smaller fry."

"One moment—I want to grasp your point a little more clearly," Whitelaw here put in, raising his hand to stay the flow of the Colonel's eloquence. "If we're the only concern of any size outside The Combine, how can we hold the whip-hand? Why, in the name of reason, isn't the boot on the other leg?"

"Because, if we stay out, we're big enough to keep up some kind of an opposition. It might very likely be a losing fight, but, while we're making it, they can't market their stock. Six months delay in that, and they're wrecked, —comprenez?"

The Colonel was simply in his element. All this reminded him of his joint debate with Henderson when he was running for the legislature ten years before. He had made a success of that, and he was likely to make a greater success of this.

He went on with even increased ardor.

"Now, quite outside of a certain little increment which has got to come to us by the market standing of the new stock, —and figuring that stock as merely at par, —I calculate a clear profit to our concern of a good deal over one hundred per cent; that is to say, we get two shares of the new stock for one of the Levenson, and a cash bonus of one million dollars, or thirty-three thirty-three per share; and what's more, Whitelaw, I've got the blamed thing down in writing."

His answer was a long low whistle which came from the direction of the swivel chair. Under cover of the babel of voices which instantly broke out, Levenson shoved a scrap of paper over to his now smiling attorney, on which was written, "How much clean cash would this stand me in?"

Whitelaw frowned slightly, thought a moment, wrote

down six expressive figures in a neat horizontal line, and shoved it back to him. Doniphan, still silently burning incense before the Levenson shrine, watched with interest the clearing away of the clouds from about the Levenson face as the Levenson mind slowly absorbed the significance of those six figures.

"I don't think we need waste time talking about this thing any more," the Chairman remarked with a charming lack of formality. "The only thing I've got against you, Colonel, is that you've known all about this for half a day without taking the trouble to tell me about it. As I'm practically the Levenson Company, I should think my opinion on the subject might carry some weight."

"If I've been the least bit formal, my dear boy, I reckon you can find a reason without going very far," the Colonel rejoined in his pleasantest manner. "To begin with, I only got my report into shape in my Harrisburg office this afternoon, since which I've only seen you at the dinner table in the presence of a couple of distinguished representatives of the press, before whom a discussion of this matter would have been unfortunate, to say the least. And now, I should like to call the attention of this Board (Mr. Thallon will be pleased to take a note of this) to certain disadvantages as well as to some additional advantages which in my opinion may accrue to us in this deal."

"Let's have the disadvantages first," Doniphan suggested.

"Well, to begin, then; I can't get you more than three representatives on the Board of the New Company,—three out of thirteen,—which means, of course, we have no control."

"Is that in just proportion to the amount of our new stock?" Doniphan asked.

"Exactly so," nodded the Colonel.

"In that case I can hardly in conscience advise Levenson

to close on this thing," Whitelaw said slowly ; "that is, if there be any question of our marketing our holdings inside the six months following the consummation of this deal."

"That's just the point I'm coming to," the Colonel rejoined cheerfully. "We *can* market our holdings inside of three months, or my reputation's gone."

Doniphan here shook his head sadly as if not entirely satisfied even with this security. The Colonel, however, failed to notice this jarring note. "And that isn't all, either," he continued with increased animation, — though lowering his voice until it had nearly the effect of a confidential whisper, — "I don't expect any of you to believe this until you have seen my figures and talked with Higgins, but, strictly between ourselves, I have proof positive that we can market this new stock, inside of three months from its appearance on the exchanges, at *one hundred and forty-five, and no questions asked*. The other thing seems almost small alongside of this, doesn't it?"

If, in the heat of passion, Leverson had ever stigmatized his celebrated father-in-law as an old fool, he inwardly took it all back now.

"What are the other disadvantages?" Doniphan asked politely.

"Why, there's the question of expense," the Colonel answered, relapsing into pensiveness.

"I was just coming to that," said Whitelaw. "How much does Higgins get out of this?"

"Not a cent out of us," the Colonel answered with pardonable pride. "Higgins and I are, as you know, tolerably close, and it's understood I can do him certain favors which will make this worth his while; that was where I found myself in a position to save your pockets. No — no thanks. I never play the philanthropist. You all know, or ought to know, that I've got the interests of this Company at heart; I think I've proved that; but, of course,

no one expects that I'm going ahead with this thing in order to realize on my small holdings."

"No one was foolish enough to expect that of you," Doniphan said with evident conviction.

"Come! out with it; how much do you want, Colonel?" Whitelaw asked, grinning pleasantly at Doniphan.

"Why, I should say an assessment of two-fifty per share on the Leverson stock to be paid out of the first cash received from the other company would be fair, wouldn't it?" the Colonel asked with renewed diffidence.

"How much would that come to?" Leverson demanded, his eyes fixed on Whitelaw, as if he were asking him to repeat his multiplication table and was keeping a sharp lookout for errors.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Oh, come! Look here!" Leverson snorted. "I'll be—" he paused abruptly, conscious that Whitelaw was pulling his sleeve.

"You see I was in a rather favorable position to pull this thing through," the Colonel went on in dreamy unconsciousness of these interruptions. "Besides Higgins, those other fellows will want a little help from me before they get into running order, so I don't suppose they'd have made quite such favorable terms with anybody else. Then, too, if I'm not very much mistaken, I'm the only man living who can successfully engineer the sale of this new stock; Higgins and the others rather look to me, I reckon, to advertise it."

"In other words, you've—" Leverson began, when the weight of Whitelaw's restraining hand again guided him into still waters.

"You couldn't make it an even two dollars?" the lawyer queried.

"I really don't see how I could," the Colonel said deprecatingly.

"Only one more question," Doniphan here put in. "Of course it betrays my ignorance of what one might call expansive finance, but I've got to get some answer to it if I'm to have this scheme perfectly clear in my own mind. I want to know who is expected to buy this new stock. If the rest of the plants brought into the New Company are anything like this, it can't earn one-half of one per cent on its stock, whatever it pays."

"My dear fellow," the Colonel answered, looking at his questioner with kindly indulgence for this irrelevancy, "the public buys it."

"Thank you; yes, I see," said the polite Doniphan.

"I think we may as well put the question whether this thing goes through," Whitelaw remarked, frowning slightly at Doniphan's interruption; "that is to say, whether as a Board we accept the conditions of the deal and direct the Secretary to call a Stockholders' Meeting to ratify. As we have two-thirds of the stock in the Chair, we might begin by informally asking it if this is worth while?"

"Make it two-twenty-five," Leverson said, addressing, though he did not look at, the Colonel; "make it two-twenty-five and I'll call it done. It means my getting out of this damned town, or I wouldn't do it even at that."

"Well, it's all in the family," the Colonel said, looking at him affectionately, "let it go at that."

A sigh of relief went round the room and the meeting practically came to an end, Leverson, the Colonel, and Whitelaw breaking into a group a little apart on the farther side of the room where they stood eagerly talking with frequent references to sheets of figures and one or two formidable looking documents with legal seals.

Doniphan, who had not been urged to join them, remained seated in his original position calmly smoking, plunged in a profound silence. Thallon was busy writing

out his notes, watched by the jealous McIntyre. Presently the Chairman rapped for order.

"It's merely the formal vote," he remarked as he lit a fresh cigar. "Let's hurry up and get through with it. It's hot enough to stifle one in this room. Here, Whitelaw, you've got it written out; how does it read?"

Doniphan woke up with a start as he heard Whitelaw beginning, "It is hereby Resolved —"

The little man here straightened himself in his chair, tossed his cigar stump into the empty grate, and had risen to his feet before Whitelaw got to the words, "approves the preliminary contract entered into on behalf of this Company by Colonel Mortimer Gilbreed, under powers vested in him by this Board, with certain parties representing the Consolidated Car Company, a copy of which preliminary contract is hereto annexed."

At this point Doniphan was conscious that Whitelaw's eyes were upon him with that same sinister glitter in them, as if he defied him to find a flaw in the web of words he was so deftly weaving. He even caught a reflection of the look in those of the urbane Colonel as Whitelaw went on:—

"And it is further: Resolved, that the compensation of the said Colonel Mortimer Gilbreed, for his services in negotiating said preliminary contract of sale, shall be fixed at the sum of sixty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, provided said sale be duly ratified and consummated; said sum to be paid him out of the first proceeds of said sale."

Doniphan's sense of humor here came to his relief as he caught Levenson trying to swallow something which evidently hurt him. It was some satisfaction to reflect that even the triumphant majority was not entirely united.

Meanwhile Whitelaw was going on with:—

"And it is further: Resolved, that the secretary of this Company be hereby authorized and directed to call a Meeting of its Stockholders at the office of the Company,

Briscom Block in the City of Brockton, for 2 P.M. on Saturday July 15th, 18—, for the purpose of ratifying or rejecting said preliminary contract."

"These Resolutions are before the Board, gentlemen," the Chair announced, obviously pleased at this opportunity of saying something.

"I move their adoption," Whitelaw said, smiling pleasantly at Doniphan.

"I second the motion," added the Colonel, jauntily.

"The Resolutions are moved and seconded," the Chair resumed, as if it knew this part of the business by heart.

"All those in favor of them may signify their approval by saying, 'Aye.'"

A cheerful chorus of ayes, which included even the depressed McIntyre, was the instant response.

"Contrary minded, 'No.'"

"I vote No," said Mobray Doniphan.

CHAPTER X

MOBRAY DONIPHAN'S CARRIAGE IS KEPT WAITING

As unexpected as it was unpleasant, an embarrassed pause followed that *viva voce* vote of the minority, though, naturally, the minority failing to share in the surprise, failed likewise to share in the embarrassment.

The Chairman, whom emotion had for the moment rendered speechless, even forgot to declare the Resolutions carried, an omission presently rectified by Whitelaw in that politely ironical voice of his, — a voice of which the Chairman was as yet utterly incapable.

"Mr. Doniphan having voted in the negative, the Resolutions are carried by a vote of four to one," the lawyer said, glancing at Thallon to see that this important fact was being entered on the minutes.

"I wish to say here," Leverson broke in, recovering the gift of speech under the soothing influence of his attorney's words, "that if Mr. Doniphan finds his position as a Director of this Company in any way inconsistent with the extraordinary position he has seen fit to assume, the way out of his entanglement is not very far to seek."

"It's very kind of you to mention it," Doniphan nodded pleasantly, "but I don't feel in the least entangled."

"Really!" Leverson went on, his voice rising slightly; "I should have said you know that in taking ground so diametrically opposed to that of the rest of the Board, you would have felt at least some discomfort. If it had

been my own act, I should have regarded it as a virtual resignation."

Although this was not in the least true, it was said with perfect sincerity. Levenson fell back into his swivel chair, feeling that he had struck a blow for the proprieties and relieved his feelings at the same time.

"I don't quite follow your argument," Doniphan returned pleasantly, producing a pair of shabby driving gloves from his pocket and beginning to put them on. "I should have said that a vote on any question, however simple, involved a possible difference of opinion, and that the time for expressing an opinion was before one's resignation, not afterwards."

"We're only too anxious to have you express it, Mr. Doniphan, at any time," the Colonel put in genially, his guiding principle that it was never worth while to quarrel with a man like Doniphan, — of certain income and uncertain vote, — uppermost in his agile mind.

Doniphan bowed.

"One thing I should especially enjoy knowing," the Boss of Henderson County continued, "is your opposition to this scheme prompted by any doubts as to my ability to carry it through? I noticed just now you did not take the trouble to glance over a little correspondence I've had with some of the principal parties in interest connected with this deal, — an oversight, if I may say so, before taking the serious step of placing yourself in antagonism in some of your oldest friends. I have no hesitation in saying, Doniphan, that I don't want you left out in this thing; it's too blamed good; besides which I don't mind admitting that I should feel personally hurt — yes, hurt — if you had any doubts as to making my words good."

"On the contrary, I believe that if any living man can unload stock of an intrinsic value of twenty-five on a

confiding public at one hundred and forty, you are the man, Colonel," Doniphan answered as he snapped the button of his second glove.

"One hundred and forty-five," the Colonel corrected, jealously guarding these last few points of clear profit; "I don't hedge my promise, not by a single cent."

"I really beg your pardon; make it one hundred and forty-five by all means," Doniphan acquiesced, his hand on the door-knob.

"And if this is not what you object to, may I ask what are your grounds of opposition?" Whitelaw asked, his warning eye on Levenson.

"Most assuredly! To put it rather bluntly, I object to playing policy with the stock of a Company of which I happen to be a Director, or with any other, for that matter. I shall not only vote against it as a Director, but after ceasing to be a Director, I shall decline putting my own stock into this reorganization or to participate in it in any way. I speak thus frankly because I wish to make my position perfectly plain."

"You've certainly succeeded in doing that," Levenson put in with a sneer, though he had flushed hotly at the other's words. "You object on an elevated point of morals. I congratulate you that, as a bachelor whose other excellent investments make him quite independent, you can afford to enjoy the luxury — I can't."

"Personally I could hardly afford to do the other thing," Doniphan said, politely ignoring the sneer, "but that is a matter which is neither here nor there. I am no more anxious to give the present company a moral lecture than they are to listen to it. Such as they are, I have given you my reasons for taking this stand against a practice which is, in my poor opinion, getting to be altogether too common in these progressive times and in this progressive country. I have only given them on being asked to do so,

and I do not expect for a moment that they will appeal to anybody else as being at all sufficient. That they are sufficient for me is, after all, the only point of any importance. As for my resignation, which strikes me as being next in order, I would like to place it now in the hands of the President of the Company. Leverson is so far right: I am out of harmony with the rest of the Board, and likely to continue so, as its remaining acts can only be connected with the winding up of the old Leverson Corporation. If you want the thing in writing, I can give it to you now."

"Not at all necessary," Whitelaw put in briskly in answer to a look from the Chair. "Mr. Thallon can enter it on the minutes that Mr. Doniphan's resignation was placed in the hands of the President, who, as Chairman, submitted it to the Board. He might add that it was accepted with regret."

"Deep regret," interpolated the Colonel.

"Thank you, very much," Doniphan said, grinning wickedly as he turned the door-knob.

"One moment more before you go," Leverson said, returning the look. "As a person rather deeply interested in the property, I'd like to ask you what you propose doing with your stock. After this thing once gets known, you can hardly sell it in the open market without realizing an enormous profit. Are we to understand that while going down on the minutes of this meeting as objecting to this sale, you propose realizing to the full the pecuniary advantage which the sale gives you as a stockholder? If you don't mind my mentioning it, your heroic position looks somewhat less heroic viewed in this light."

"I'm very glad you spoke of it," the little man continued with imperturbable good nature in the face of the insult. "Except you oblige me to, I have no intention of selling my holdings in the open market. As you know, my four

hundred shares represent a loan of twenty thousand dollars which my father made to John Levenson some fifteen years ago, when he first bought the Levenson Works. When soon after John Levenson's death, the Company was first incorporated on the advice of Mr. Whitelaw, the stock issued represented at par about twice the capital actually invested in the business."

"It was earning ten per cent on every share," Whitelaw remarked easily.

"Just so," Doniphan nodded, "and at the time it did not strike me as very material whether I got ten per cent on the Levenson stock representing forty thousand, or twenty per cent on John Levenson's note for twenty thousand. It was my father's understanding with him that he was to share in the growing profits of the business, and as the stock has never sold for more than fifty since, I could not at any time have more than realized the original investment. Now that in these days we have got down to six per cent, it might not, under ordinary circumstances, sell for as much."

"But, as I've just remarked, we're not under ordinary circumstances," Levenson put in impatiently.

"No one, I think, knows that better than Mr. Doniphan," Whitelaw remarked with his ambiguous smile. "If he is anxious to avoid the ill-gotten gains which seem drifting in our direction, I don't see that I can do him a greater favor than offer him sixty, cash down, for his four hundred shares. That's a flat offer, Mr. Doniphan."

"I make it seventy," the Colonel said, his eyes snapping, "to be paid out of my commission, as soon as I get it."

Levenson looked at these two, his loyal supporters, with profound disgust. They had both held themselves so close to him for these last few years, to their own great advantage, and this was how they repaid him—by trying to outbid him in a race for certain little perquisites peculiarly

his own. But they would find he was not so easily beaten.

"I make it seventy-five," he growled savagely, the veins on his forehead standing out big and purple, his handsome eyes on Doniphan.

The last-named gentleman laughed outright—the very harshest laugh of which even he was capable.

"Come! I'll put you out of your misery, Leverson," he said. "I'll sell the stock to you because you represent your brother in a way no one else can possibly do, — John Lever-son, to whom the loan was originally made, — and I'll sell at fifty, not a cent more or less. If you're as glad to get it as I am to get rid of it, it ought to make you happy. Let me know when you want them, and I'll turn in the certificates. And now I really must be off. I'll trouble you to ring for my carriage, but don't bother to see me out. I want to speak to Margaret before I go, and she can do the honors. Good night, gentlemen, good night."

There was a curious note of varying intensity noticeable in the answers to Mobray Doniphan's parting salutation. Every man in the room, save one, thought him more or less cracked, but this common belief was mixed with considerations which varied as much as the individuals that harbored them.

To the Colonel Doniphan was not only mad but decidedly dangerous, and the first idea which came to him after the door closed, was that this lunatic might possibly spread the confidential information he had just obtained before a gaping crowd at the first Brockton corner he passed.

To Leverson this unexpected outcome of the late unpleasantness appealed simply as something irresistibly funny, but out of deference to Whitelaw's restraining eye, he confined himself to grinning triumphantly at both him and the Colonel as he leaned forward to touch the electric button on his table. He could, in fact, very well afford to

indulge in cynical humor. He had made something over thirty thousand dollars within the last fifteen minutes, for, crazy or not, he had (oddly enough) no doubt that Doniphan, to use a phrase of the Colonel's, would "deliver the goods."

He rose and adjourned the meeting mechanically, after giving Morgan, who answered the bell, the necessary orders as to Doniphan's carriage. Then everybody began talking at once,—that is, of course, every one except Thallon, who was busy finishing his notes, and McIntyre who, taking up his shabby hat, departed with respectful salutations which no one paid the slightest attention to.

"In the name of common sense, what do you suppose possessed the man?" Leverson asked, suppressing a yawn.

There was no need of being more explicit. Whitelaw perfectly understood the reference, though for answer he merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled his ambiguous smile.

"No need to inquire too closely, my dear boy," the Colonel put in lightly. "He's chosen to make you a deucedly handsome present, and for Heaven's sake take it and be thankful. I won't pretend I don't envy you, as it bars me out of something which was good enough for the likes of me, though not quite so good; but I wish you joy just the same. You were born with the traditional silver spoon in your mouth, so naturally you get the best pickings. Truth to tell, we're none of us in a position to apply for a commission in lunacy to sit on our generous friend. May no one sit on him so long as he continues to dispense his favors with such a lavish if not impartial hand. In the meantime we will abstain from criticism. Ashton can certainly afford to if we can; eh, Whitelaw?"

There was a general laugh, and the company broke up in the best of spirits. If Thallon did not join in it, it was doubtless because he was busy doing up the bundle of

papers and documents confided to his keeping by the displaced McIntyre. He was given to understand he was to accompany Whitelaw to the Company's office where they were to be filed for safe-keeping.

The Colonel and Leverson accompanied them to the door, the latter giving the new secretary instructions about being on hand in the morning, when they were to commence their literary labors. As soon as they were gone, the Colonel ran his arm affectionately through Leverson's as they turned back into the study, where the stale tobacco smoke hung in heavy clouds, as if over some sanguinary field of battle — a field which had just witnessed so signal a triumph of the Leverson arms.

No one knew better than the Colonel that he was, for the moment, out of his son-in-law's good books, and, it may be added, no one knew better how to get back into them. Like most stupid people, Leverson never completely trusted anybody, though his own limitations obliged him to almost entirely depend upon other people's labor. His only remedy for what he considered a lack of loyalty in his dependents was dismissal, but though this might be efficacious with his domestics, and even his clerks, it could not be made to apply quite so nicely to his father-in-law. He had fully made up his mind when the Colonel had begun bidding against him for the Doniphan stock, that he would give him a broad hint that there were other places than Elmhurst where a rising politician might spend the summer to advantage; but his unexpected victory in that encounter had somewhat softened his judgment, and this softening process was accelerated as the Colonel now proceeded to dilate on the brilliant prospects which stretched before them both, — prospects which could only become assured facts through that delicacy of finesse of which he, the Colonel, was alone capable.

On leaving the house Doniphan had turned down one

of the broad gravel walks which led toward the rear garden, where he had seen Margaret Levenson disappear after dinner. The moon had not yet risen, but the bright starlight enabled him to presently make out her white dress against the intensely dark background of the clipped yew hedges.

He gave one of his little grunts of dissatisfaction at the simultaneous perception of an accompanying figure also in white, though the garments of this second personage were unmistakably masculine, enclosing a pair of long, though symmetrical legs and a superstructure of equally graceful proportions.

"Good evening, Mr. Doniphan," came in a bright, cheery voice from out the shadow of the yews, as the intruder advanced upon it.

"Dear me; it's Reggie," Doniphan grunted, not over-graciously. "How in the world did you get here?"

"Well, the feat was not remarkably difficult," the young fellow laughed good-humoredly. "I reached Brockton on the eight-thirty, took a cab at the station, and drove out to Elmhurst. I've met men who have accomplished more in the way of travel without joining a geographical society. Like the model brother I am, I came out to see Madge first and foremost. I can't realize it's only three months since I left; I suppose because I've crammed so much into the time. I feel as if I'd been away a year."

"Humph! I should have said you'd just gone," Doniphan remarked ungraciously, though he smiled as he said it, for much as he wanted to get rid of him now he was really fond of the boy. "By the way, our business meeting's over, so you'll find your father at liberty if you want to embrace him."

"Thanks, very much, but I saw him in Harrisburg this afternoon. We had a most delightful interview, but I don't feel justified in renewing it now. One should always

be reasonable, you know, in their drafts on the family affections. Madge here was just saying something to that effect when you came up; weren't you, Madge?" he added with a laugh.

"To my certain knowledge she's given you a good deal more of it than you deserve, young man," Doniphan retorted, drawing the girl's hand through his arm and beginning to pace slowly down the hedge-bordered path, a movement which helped to cover Margaret's embarrassed silence. "If any one's charity ever began at home, yours has, Madge Leverson."

"I'm sometimes very much afraid it has ended there," the girl said with an unaccustomed touch of sadness in her voice, though she smiled at him as she said it; a word of praise meant so much in the mouth of Mobray Doniphan, and it was, of all times, most welcome to her then.

"Well, we won't argue that point, especially as I'm about to give you an opportunity to broaden your field of usefulness," he went on with one of his contented little grunts. "I want to know if you can give me an hour or two a day on my proof-reading, — 'The Italiana,' you know. I've got to make comparisons pretty well through the last seven volumes of Tiraboschi to be quite certain I'm right on half a dozen disputed points; a beastly job, and not a man in Brockton with education enough to be of the slightest use except it is Faucon, and he's too busy making converts to ritualism to think of anything else. I'm literally swamped with the thing; kept it three months longer than I had any right to from my long-suffering publishers — but I can't have it go as it is. Come, and be made a martyr of in a noble cause."

There was a hardly perceptible pause which covered a mere shadow of hesitation in the girl's manner before she answered him, but when it came, her answer left nothing to be desired.

"I'll come to-morrow afternoon if that will do," she said. "It will do me quite as much good as it can possibly do you, and I believe you know it."

Doniphan laughed with genuine satisfaction. The fact that the girl was eating her heart out amid the glitter of the Levenson riches had been patent enough to him earlier in the evening, and his perception of it had close connection with this exaggerated description of his literary straits. He was wondering whether she would have added anything to what she had said if Reggie had not been present. He had wanted to give her some hint of that impending break in her life to which the developments of that evening had so clearly pointed; but in the presence of this irresponsible young man, it seemed wise to leave that subject unbroached.

Once clear of the Levenson Works, it required no particular astuteness to perceive that it would not take Ashton Levenson long to shake the dust of Brockton from his patent-leather shoes. What that would mean for Margaret, no one knew better than the crusty old bachelor who was just then sauntering down the Elmhurst alleys with the girl's hand resting lightly on his arm. Of course such a parting of sacred ties was but the common lot of woman, but it was a fate which usually had its compensations. What compensations were likely to be hers?

The man in him rose at the thought. Unconsciously he held the arm upon which her hand rested a trifle more firmly. He entirely forgot for the moment that she was at least three inches taller than he was; he felt quite big enough to protect her, — and in the best sense of the word he *was*.

"Do you go back to your old quarters at the Burney House?" he demanded abruptly of his male companion as they turned back toward the front of the house and his waiting carriage.

"Yes, if I'm not dispossessed for non-payment of rent," the young fellow laughed; "and as Lindley's the agent, I think my chances are fairly good. I've conquered the dear man by the strength of one of his weaknesses."

"I didn't know Lindley had any weaknesses," Doniphan said, thinking of drink and tobacco.

"One, anyway. It's poetry. The Doctor caught it last summer when Ikey Hubble went through Brockton peddling books. Somehow or other he got stuck with a copy of Arnold's 'Light of Asia,' which he worked off on the Doctor at ten per cent premium to the dear man's undoing. I don't think Uncle Cuthbert half liked it. You know he and Lindley are not altogether harmonious. Lindley's so Low Church."

"I should have said the 'Light of Asia' was distinctly ritualistic," Doniphan said gravely; "but what has that to do with your paying rent?"

"Why, everything. Seeing how the land lay, I got a copy myself, and when he came down to collect, I always had a passage that required explanation. It interrupted my work more or less, but as an investment 'Guatama Boodha' paid well. I think I owed six months when I went away, and we'd only got to the seventh page. By the bye, come down and see me some afternoon. I've brought over a lot of stuff from the other side which you'll find it worth your while to look at if you ever have such a thing as an idle hour."

"Have you sold any of your work?" Doniphan asked with a grunt.

"Not lately. You know I can't paint for the market; that kind of thing's death to any true feeling for art. However, my portrait of that Romeyn girl I began in New York last winter ought to put me in funds if I ever get time to finish it."

"Is the Romeyn girl to be sent on by express for the purpose?" Doniphan asked dryly.

"Well, hardly; her time's too valuable, but I shall be there for a couple of weeks in the autumn, so there's a fighting chance."

"A couple of weeks in the autumn," Doniphan repeated absently, "and in the meantime we have, as you say, a fighting chance. Well, I really must be off. Good night!"

He took Margaret's hand an instant in his large, thin one as his man turned the wheel of the waiting carriage, sprang in with the elastic step of a boy of twenty, and a moment later was whirling down the long drive which led to the Elmhurst gates.

"What a lucky old duffer he is!" Reggie remarked, as the brother and sister stood watching the departing vehicle in the bright starlight until it disappeared behind the clustering elms below the lawn. "*He's* never had to work for the market, — not much!"

"But he *has* worked," she said suggestively; "worked the way you have got to work if you are ever to be honest or manly. About this horrible new load of debt you have brought home with you, I can't help you. I simply haven't got the money, but this debt to Dr. Lindley has got to be paid at once."

"I don't owe it to him; it's the Burney heirs," Reggie corrected her.

"You know perfectly well he has never let them lose a penny of it. He has taken it out of his own pocket because he knows it's hard for you to pay and because he's fond of you."

"If that's so, he's a devilish good fellow and I'm very much obliged to him."

"You ought to be ashamed to say so!" she cried indignantly; "you with your ability and education, hopelessly lazy at two and twenty, — and you sneer at Mr. Doniphan

who has made a noble name for himself by sheer hard work."

"Oh, bother! I don't call that work,—to do just what you want to do. According to that, Leverson's the hardest worked man in the universe," Reggie returned with his usual delightful candor. "Come, it's getting late. Let's go in."

CHAPTER XI

ONE-SIDED CONFIDENCE

"THERE she is again!" Thallon exclaimed, halting abruptly as, at a turn of the carriage drive, Whitelaw and he came within sight of the Elmhurst gates.

"You mean Jane Kirk," the lawyer answered promptly, though he was looking at Thallon, not at the couple of shadowy figures at some little distance under the overarching trees. "Evidently taking her evening stroll, though well guarded, as usual. I take it the other woman's Celeste, Miss Laurie's maid. Poor old Jane! I understand from Leverson that you were the innocent cause of this last attack. A rather rough specimen to do duty as the family skeleton in the Leverson closet."

"Then there *is* a skeleton," the other said with gay indifference, as he resumed his swinging walk. "I thought that kind of thing was confined to novels, and even in them to families of ancient lineage and a habitation more or less in ruins. One does not connect the idea with a nineteenth-century villa containing the usual modern improvements."

"Why, frankly, the idea is as new to me as it can be to you — perhaps more so. Of course, having eyes, I could hardly fail to notice that there was a certain family sensitiveness about the old woman's affliction. It comes out principally in Miss Laurie, for one could hardly call Leverson sensitive about anything except his own achievements. Perhaps, even from Miss Laurie's standpoint, we could hardly call Jane a skeleton, though Heaven knows she's

thin enough. I believe I used the expression for the first time just now. If I'm not very much mistaken, the same phrase had occurred to you before."

"Possibly! At least I noticed the quality you refer to in Miss Laurie when she made her appearance in Mr. Levenson's study this afternoon. Do we take the electric cars in, or do you prefer to walk?"

"Quite the same to me, though as it's not over a mile and a half and the night young, I should suggest walking."

They turned out of the iron gates and into the long avenue lined on either side at wide intervals with its beautiful modern country houses, embowered, for the most part, in clustering foliage. The night air was cool, the night itself beautiful, with the beauty of early spring. They were in the comparatively new residence quarter of Brockton, the product of its forty years of successful manufacturing.

Thallon felt, somehow, in close touch with it. The sensation of being a homeless wanderer — so strong upon him that morning at the Levenson Works — had entirely left him. He certainly, of all men, had reason to feel satisfied with his day's work, though he was not quite certain that his day's work was as yet quite over.

The lawyer's manner was even more than friendly, — one might almost have called it ingratiating, as he chatted on unreservedly with his companion. Ingratiating frankness was, at times, Whitelaw's strongest card, and he was playing it now with apparent recklessness. His doing so with this newly fledged protégé of Levenson's was, if the latter had only known it, the greatest compliment he could have paid him. Whitelaw was not in the habit of wasting his sweetness on the desert air.

In brains they were very equally matched, as Whitelaw was perfectly well aware, or he would have taken no such trouble as he was taking to draw the other man out. As a reward for this condescension he had, as yet, made small

progress in the younger man's confidence, much less even than had Dr. Lindley with his perfectly transparent curiosity and straightforward questions. Thallon made no further reference to skeletons, dropping back instead on the events of the evening, which offered a field for comment large enough for a special correspondent.

"It seems the Gilbreed connection is not altogether unprofitable from a financial point of view," he was saying in answer to some remark of Whitelaw's about the Colonel. "From what I knew of him in Harrisburg, I'd been led to suppose that in things of that kind he was rather visionary and unstable."

"So he is," Whitelaw returned. "Personally, I wouldn't have given a brass farthing for what he had to say about holding the winning cards, but I did take the very substantial written proofs which he had to offer; especially as they tallied with certain information I'd gleaned from other sources as to Higgins's status in the deal. If he's seen fit to employ Gilbreed in this thing, it's because he knows he can use him to advantage. I believe the Colonel is absolutely certain of the Senatorship, and that's a title which has a salable quality. If I had Higgins's money, I shouldn't care to use the Colonel in that way, but then, of course, Higgins is not a gentleman, whereas Gilbreed has got a family behind him. That's the reason I'm sorry for him."

"Then you agree with Mr. Leverson that maintaining something like a decent tone in business affairs is merely a matter of being able to afford it?" Thallon asked, much surprised at Whitelaw's being sorry for anybody.

"It's unquestionably true. No one supposes for a moment that if the Colonel enjoyed a comfortable income, he would spend his time in dabbling in the dirty water of politics. He's a man of really great gifts; a superb organizer, of no mean powers of eloquence, and, as I've said, of good traditions. If he'd had an independence, he

could have reached the Senate in even less time than this, and reached it by a clean, straight road. Don't you suppose he would have liked that better? Of course he would! He couldn't afford it, — that's all."

"The same theory hardly applies to Mr. Levenson."

"Quite as much; though, the conditions being different, Levenson is not in the same boat. There's a distinction, not at all fine, between profiting quite indirectly by certain manipulations and taking an active part in them. All Levenson and the rest of us are called upon to do, is to realize on our stock when the market is got into the right conditions. We have nothing whatever to do in getting it there. Mind, I don't say this gives us any right to take any high moral ground; none of us have taken it, but it does keep us out of the mud. Levenson himself is a case in point. It's a matter of life and death with him to get away from Brockton where, at present, he has the bulk of his fortune invested; yet you couldn't hire him for love or money to correspond directly with Higgins about the deal. Now that's the result solely of his having lived most of his life among gentlemen; it hasn't made him one, but he's imbibed some of their prejudices."

Thallon laughed. He was perfectly conscious of the bad taste of the remark, having himself invited it. He could hardly ignore it, but he shifted the inquiry.

"And where does Mr. Doniphan come in?" he asked.

"Why, he fairly clinches the argument. As the only man in the room who could afford to snap his fingers at what he considered a shady transaction, he promptly proceeded to snap them. I was rather glad Levenson reminded him of the fact. He had no reason to grin over it, though that's a small matter. To sum up, as we lawyers say, my theory holds water all through. The completely independent man washes his hands of the whole affair, — most of us take our little profits humbly and say nothing, while one

or two, desperately poor, do the dirty work. No!—this is not a world in which to throw stones. It may not be a beautiful system, but you gain nothing by shutting your eyes to it. Gentlemen are born, not made, but they only remain such as long as they're blessed with a gentleman's income. I've seen the best blood in Maryland go to pieces for lack of one. My ancestors came over with the Calverts, but I've come devilish near going to pieces myself for the same reason. Perhaps you know what I mean."

Thallon nodded, glancing up at the elder man's clear-cut face, apparently so easily readable in the bright starlight. Despite himself he felt more or less under its fascination.

"I don't quite see your object in putting off the ratification of this thing for three months," he said presently with some abruptness. "If you're so cock-sure of the thing, I should think the sooner it was done the better."

"Leverson asked the same question," the other returned with that evasive drawing down of the corners of the mouth which might mean almost anything. "You have no idea of the intricacy of these stock-jobbing deals. Hitches may occur at any time, and at any point, when to hurry would mean flat failure. Then there's one or two things I must know better before we clinch this thing, and I must have plenty of elbow room. I shall be glad if all goes well for more reasons than one. It'll be a godsend to Leverson, and I'm very far from having anything against Leverson from a financial point of view, though there are some things very much against him."

"Indeed! What things?" Thallon asked innocently.

"He's so damned cruel to women," Whitelaw said, intense passion breaking for an instant through his polished crust,—a passion as rare with him as the oath he used to express it. "But there—I won't enlarge on that point," he went on, recovering himself; "if he can get his money

out and get away from Brockton without disgracing himself, I'm satisfied."

"Is the estate so much embarrassed as all that?"

"Oh, no; I don't mean financial disgrace. True, he's made some holes in the capital, but you needn't worry about that. It will go to the next heir more than intact if we're able to get it round this corner," he added, glancing at his companion with an odd twinkle in his keen gray eyes.

"Who is next of kin?" the other asked coolly.

"I said heir—the kin are only distant cousins. The wife has a full life interest by will, but on her death it goes back to the Levenson blood. I talk to you rather openly about all this, as it will come within your province as confidential clerk."

"He said nothing about it to me," Thallon rejoined in some surprise. "He engaged me for literary work."

"Very likely, but he has no idea of confining you to that. Your connection with Hartley & Bald will prove useful to you there, and I'm quite sure you needn't worry about being kept busy. He has a talent for keeping other people busy, has Levenson. He informed me to-day that he intended taking his personal affairs out of my office, for which I don't mind saying I'm devoutly thankful. A perfect child in money matters, with a fatal superstition that, by some occult process of bookkeeping, an overdrawn income can be made into a credit balance. His accounts with me are always overdrawn, and when it gets to a point where he has to be brought up with a round turn, he comes down to the office and makes a scene. He says the reason why his affairs are so involved is because I haven't kept his books straight. I wish you joy of the job."

"In Heaven's name how does he manage to spend the money? He can't spend it here!"

"Oh, yes, he can, though he has various other interests

which help him to get rid of most of it, — a house in New York, another in Newport, a shooting-box in Scotland, and, I believe, a house in London. Three months in the twelve is the most he's ever given Brockton until this year, and he wouldn't give that now if he wasn't trying to sell out. That's where the difference comes in between an aristocracy of blood, or what's the same thing — land, and an aristocracy of portable property, or money. The most degenerate of the English nobility, at least, had some interest in the soil, — had to have in order to live, — to say nothing of holding his place in his caste. An American millionaire of the second generation — once well away from the smell of the machinery — is responsible to nothing but his own sweet will. He may be a model citizen, — very likely most of them are, — but it's not from force of circumstances."

Thallon, not in the least interested in abstract theories about millionnaires, here adroitly turned the current of the talk back into personal channels.

"And Mrs. Leverson — does she assist the Scotch shooting-box and the Newport villa in getting rid of the cash?"

Whitelaw's manner froze solidly at the mention of the name.

"I really couldn't tell you," he said stiffly.

"I was only trying to fit one of your own theories to the lady's case, wondering whether she enjoyed that enviable independence which you regard as the corner-stone of nobility."

"Oh, my theories are not made to fit women," Whitelaw returned gloomily, though with an evident effort to recover his friendly tone. "I've known them to sing a Gloria over a crust of bread and prepare for heaven on three hundred dollars a year. It's a survival, I suppose, of something better in the race, though where it came in I hardly know, because originally, of course, we were all beasts. Well,

well, in the present case, though I dare say this new concern will go smash, I have the recompense of knowing that Leverson will get his money out and that Brockton will be no worse off without him. Ah, I see you know your way about already. A stranger might hardly recognize this as the beginning of the main street — within two minutes' walk of the office. What a magnificent night it is!"

As he spoke he turned his face up to the brilliant star-strewn sky. In the east a soft flush over the distant hills foretold the coming moon. A brisk breeze had sprung up from the river; the chill in the air was more noticeable. They were still in the country with the sound of the chirping crickets, though the hitherto widely scattered houses were momentarily getting closer together. Here and there a scrap of flagged pavement broke the gravel; an electric car flashed past them on its way into the city.

They walked on steadily, the talk languishing. Thallon, for his part, devoutly hoped he had made no enemy of a man who was certainly in a position to do him considerable harm; but he still very much preferred his enmity to any deeper understanding with him, such as Whitelaw's engaging confidence had seemed to hint at. It was some years now since Owen Thallon had found himself possessed of those useful cuspids, popularly known as eye teeth. They had "come through" under stress of circumstances which had required the mastication of some very unpleasant facts, but, being there, they were now fully justifying their existence.

"Here we are," Whitelaw was saying, as, having traversed a block or two of solidly built-up street, he turned into a dark passageway between two brilliantly lighted shops and began ascending a pair of creaking stairs with the assured step of a man who knew his ground even in the dark. "This is Briscoe Block. I've my office in the

same building, in fact connecting with this of the Company. Wait here a minute while I turn on the light."

In the darkness Thallon heard the turning of a key in an unwilling lock, heard his companion's footsteps crossing an uncarpeted floor, and an instant later was half blinded by the glare of an electric light.

The room he perceived, as soon as his eyes adjusted themselves to the light, was scantily, almost shabbily, furnished, with a long table in the centre, five or six cane-seated chairs, and a couple of large safes. It was oppressively close, the windows having, apparently, been closed all day. Through them the noises of the street below seemed muffled and far off.

Whitelaw made no move to open them — the work in hand was not likely to take long. He had already stooped down before one of the safes, across the front of which was inscribed, in large gilt letters, "The Leverston Car Company," and was turning the index wheel of the combination with deft, sure fingers.

"It's not an impressive sanctuary to enclose the records of a three-million-dollar plant," he remarked. "I reckon the Consolidated Company will have to have something much more swell if it's to market its stock. This place was never got up for show, but it's seen some solid work done, as I've reason to know, having done some of it myself. Now for the papers and your minute book — they go in here — so — and the job's done."

He closed the big steel door with a snap, swung the index wheel over to the right, tried the handle with a jerk, and rose to his feet. A moment later they were in the street again.

"Where are you stopping?" he asked abruptly, as if he had locked his business affairs into the safe upstairs and now had leisure for the first time to regard his companion as a man.

"At the Everett. I moved in there this afternoon."

"The best you can do in Brockton, I reckon, on short notice. I have bachelor quarters a square or two the other way. Will you come round for a cigar and a glass of brandy and soda before you turn in? I can't offer you anything better."

"Much obliged, but I think the turning in will have to be made the first order of business; it's close on twelve."

"Good night, then," Whitelaw said, holding out his hand with completely recovered cordiality. "If I can be of any use, let me know — good night."

Thallon took it without a moment's hesitation, almost satisfied at last that he had nicely rounded out his day's work. Yet, as he walked slowly back to his hotel, through streets still more or less filled by the habitués of Brockton's numerous saloons, he possessed a disagreeable consciousness that, though he had taken the only course consistent with safety, in keeping his own counsel, it was perfectly on the cards that Randal Whitelaw could get along without it much better than he could get along without Randal Whitelaw.

CHAPTER XII

AN UNFORTUNATE SUCCESS

"I DON'T see how you can go on taking an interest in people you dislike, for you obviously *do* dislike him," Mildred Gilbreed observed to her sister as they turned their backs on the Elmhurst breakfast table, which had been occupied by the family in relays since eight o'clock, and sauntered out through the open French windows of the dining room into the inviting shade of the wide veranda beyond. "When I dislike people, I always avoid them. It's so much simpler."

"I really was not aware that I had devoted any time to Mr. Thallon," Margaret returned with a look of annoyance; "but there is no earthly reason why I should avoid him. His position here is, I think, a rather trying one, and if I have made it any easier for him by a few small civilities when we meet at my own table, I am only too glad to hear it. What you say, however, is true; I don't especially like him."

"Why?"

"Well, if you really want to know, — though I hardly see how it can possibly signify, — he does not impress me as being particularly sincere."

"People like that never are. Of course, he owes his place to flattering Ashton, and he doubtless gets very good wages for doing it."

Margaret flushed slightly, as if the remark grated on her.

"I don't agree with you about his flattering Ashton,"

she said thoughtfully. "Insincerity need not always take that form. There are times when he says things to him some of us would not dare to say, and yet he retains more influence over him than any one I know except Mr. Thallon. You remember the other evening when Mr. Thallon had stayed late and Ashton asked him to play chess after dinner. It would have been easy for a man in his position to have accepted defeat. Ashton dislikes being beaten, and shows it."

"Yes; we all know that, and act accordingly," Mildred put in with a little grimace.

"Yes; but *he* did not. I could see he was doing his best to win. It was noticeable, for Ashton plays well. You know how it came out, and Ashton was annoyed, as usual, but the next evening he asked him again. He's quite one of the family now. If his work were half as sincere as his chess, I should have more faith in him."

"I hardly see why you should allow that to annoy you."

"I did not say it annoyed me."

"But it does," Mildred persisted. "He came into the breakfast room to give Ashton some papers half an hour ago, and you looked positively uncomfortable when you had to say good morning to him."

"Then I can only say I showed very bad taste. I only hope Mr. Thallon is less observing than you are. I should be more than sorry if I had given him the impression that I attached so much importance to the matter. It strikes me he is sufficiently imbued with a sense of his own importance as it is."

Mildred was about to graciously acknowledge this admission, when her attention was attracted by the appearance of Reggie around the corner of the house. He was dressed in immaculate white boating flannels and was accompanied by a bevy of dogs.

"Leverson's waiting for you down at the landing," he

called up to his younger sister from his place on the lawn at the foot of the veranda. "You'd better hurry, for we've got to make the most of this breeze, such as it is. Better change your mind, Madge, and come along. Hilda Faucon's coming. We're to pick her up at Simpson's wharf. Come! Let that old fossil do his own digging for one day and join the incorrigibly lazy."

Margaret colored with genuine pleasure as she threw him a smiling negative. In spite of Reggie's hatred of lectures and the fact that she often lectured him, she knew well enough that she was the boy's favorite—his favorite in a motherly sort of way, despite his two years' seniority. She was very human, and it was a keen pleasure to her to feel that she was *first* with some one. Of course it would not last. When she had trained him into the brilliant, successful man he ought to be, the right woman would come along and take him from her. She was quite prepared for that,—quite prepared to resign him to such a woman with the proud consciousness that he would do her infinite credit.

Three weeks had flown by since Reggie's return, and if he were not as yet a reformed character, he had expressed such noble sentiments in that connection that it was impossible not to feel encouraged. The same period had brought the Colonel and Mildred on from Harrisburg, the former in the full flush of a triumphant vindication at the hands of an enthusiastic legislature (achieved only after he had quelled an incipient revolt within the lines of the party caucus), the latter bent on making the most of those Elmhurst advantages with which, to her wonder and disgust, Margaret had accomplished so little.

The Elmhurst "advantages" were certainly not in Margaret's thoughts just then. She stood where her sister had left her, leaning slightly against one of the low pillars of the veranda, lost in a pleasant reverie, as she watched the

two white figures making their way down the gravel walk of the beautiful old garden toward the little landing on the river bank below.

All the dogs had followed these seekers after pleasure save Don, the St. Bernard, who, perfectly aware they would be turned back at the landing, and too dignified to place himself in an awkward position, had declined the attempt with a yawn, and, slowly mounting the veranda steps, now thrust his nose into his mistress's hand as it hung listlessly at her side.

She turned with a slight start at the cool, moist touch, — a start which might easily have been ascribed to a less simple cause, for there, directly behind her in one of the long French windows of Leverson's study, stood Owen Thallon regarding her fixedly.

Her first impulse was to ask him how long he had been there, and her annoyance was not lessened when she realized the following moment that a question of that kind was hardly permissible addressed to a person who at least occupied the position of a gentleman in her husband's house. It was useless to tell herself with some scorn, that it was nothing to her if he had chosen to overhear her rather frank remarks about himself some moments since. She had, after all, no right to discuss his character even, as she had supposed, behind his back, and in a way which became distinctly embarrassing when she discovered it had been practically before his face. His dependent position only made her carelessness the less excusable.

His first words removed all doubts that he had heard.

"May I ask, Mrs. Leverson, what makes you think me insincere?" he began without preface, as if he were taking a perfectly natural part in the conversation she had been carrying on with her sister.

She could not help feeling that he was taking a mean advantage of the situation, but if he insisted on doing

so there was seemingly no help for it. She was quite prepared to make her answer as straightforward as his question.

"Because I do not believe you could possibly do the work you are doing if you were," she said without an instant's hesitation.

She knew well enough that her first doubt of the young fellow had come to her some days before when Leverson, with enormous pride, had shown her a large pile of spoiled foolscap as the product of his own ceaseless toil. She had opened it with a very genuine desire to mark its virtues, but had not read ten pages of this brand-new, beautifully written manuscript, when the real truth of its composition came home to her. Bad as it was as literature, one thing about it was absolutely clear, that it was written by a very clever man under adverse circumstances. It was impossible to read it without respecting Owen Thallon's brains — and equally impossible to read it, under the circumstances, and retain as much respect for Owen Thallon's principles.

"Do you refer to its quality? I hope you don't imagine for a moment that I consider it good," he went on.

"On the contrary — while it is unquestionably clever — it is not at all the kind of work that any man who could do it would consider good. You would not dream of publishing it under your own name, but you are quite ready some else should publish it under his, though you know he will be disappointed in the result."

"That is true," he said, coloring slightly as he met her serious eyes; "yet I may say in self-defence that I have all along had large doubts whether it ever gets as far as publication. It struck me I was being employed on something purely a pastime on Mr. Leverson's part, and that if he got enough amusement out of it to compensate him for my salary, the result was no affair of mine."

"You are wrong to imagine he will not publish it," she returned, speaking more guardedly when she found herself touching on this dangerous ground. "He will publish it when it is finished ; it will be mercilessly criticised, and he will be made not only angry, but miserably wretched, for he is sensitive to criticism because he has never had it to bear. Your being dismissed in disgrace will not repair the injury you have done him, for which you will have been paid out of his own purse."

The color deepened on the young man's face. There are limits to masculine patience even when its overstretching is referable to a very handsome girl of twenty, who happens to be the wife of one's employer. However, he had only himself to thank for it ; he had asked for her opinion, and it struck him he was getting it with a vengeance. Don, as if he rather enjoyed this turning of the tables, was standing by his beloved lady regarding the victim with open-mouthed, drivelling amusement.

"Suppose I had not done all this," Thallon said, not without a touch of hostility in his tone, though his eyes were on her with a deeper concern than any woman had ever inspired in him before ; "how many men would have taken the place only too willingly. You remember that day at Dr. Lindley's. You were kind enough then to show some interest in my getting the position. Perhaps because you'd not then discovered my lack of principle."

There was a ring of bitterness in the last words he had not meant to put there, though it did not escape her quick ear. She had no intention of qualifying what she had to say, but she could not help feeling sorry for him just the same.

"I certainly had no idea then that your work would take this direction," she went on gravely. "Mr. Leverson has had numberless secretaries, but none of them until

now have undertaken to write his novels for him. I think we are safe in supposing that none of the others would have made the same kind of success of it. You needn't take that as a compliment," she added with a touch of severity, in answer to an irrepressible smile which at the moment flitted across Thallon's face; "it's not a distinction to be especially proud of, — having great gifts and throwing them away. What I want to say is (so long as you thought fit to overhear my remark to Miss Gilbreed) that it is an unfortunate success both for Mr. Leverson and for you."

"My overhearing the remark was quite unavoidable," Thallon returned, drawing himself up slightly. "I was at work within three steps of the window as you stood here talking. But let that pass; it matters very little whether a nameless stranger is a gentleman or not. Supposing him not to be one, why is this success of mine unfortunate for me?"

"Forgive me if I spoke unkindly," she said with a touch of contrition which showed itself more in an intuitive gesture of the hands than in her voice. "Perhaps it is because I think you are a gentleman that I want to save you from doing something I think you will regret. It will injure you in the first place, because you cannot injure others without injuring yourself; in the second, because you are capable of doing much better work in literature. It is absurd for you to speak as if you were dependent on this position. You could have made a much better, a much more honest place for yourself elsewhere. Why have you chosen this?"

The color had all left his face now. His easy carriage, as he stood there in the frame of the tall French window, had somehow lost all trace of carelessness. The hand which he had raised as if to interrupt her with some passionate rejoinder was tightly clenched. Supposing he took

her at her word. Had he, after all, anything to conceal, — anything to be ashamed of? She would, of course, take sides against him, but he would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that he was in the right, and that she would have to eat her own fine words about nobility of purpose if she denied it. Another moment and he had dismissed the idea as childish; yes, worse than that — melodramatic. When a moment later he did speak, it was with completely recovered self-possession, and to ask a question — not to answer hers.

“Suppose that I were to give up this work though remaining here, — for I believe there is plenty of room for me to earn my salary quite outside these miserable attempts at fiction,” he said, smiling, — “would that increase your faith in my sincerity?”

She looked at him in undisguised surprise.

“If you gave such overwhelming proof of it, how could I fail to have faith in you?” she said simply. “Yet even if it were possible, I fail to see your object in staying here. You would certainly be standing in your own light. Your position at the best could only be subordinate — could lead to nothing. In three months we will be leaving Elmhyrst. Mr. Leverson’s idea is, I think, to have you accompany him. Such a life would be for you very little better than a waste of time.”

It struck him then for the first time that she was as yet unaware of the impending change in the Leverson fortunes. It seemed well-nigh incredible that her husband could have gone on deliberately for three weeks maturing plans which were to so materially change the current of her life without taking the trouble to inform her of it. Thallon knew the secret had been carefully guarded for business reasons, but this was an excess of caution hardly in keeping with Leverson’s character. Though this young fellow was far from guessing what the change would mean

to her, its being kept from her struck him as rather brutal. This discovery did not increase his love for his employer, though it was obviously none of his business to inform her. He had, however, a perfect right to make the possibilities of his position clear to her, and he proceeded to do so for his own satisfaction.

"I think you overrate Mr. Levenson's dependence on my literary efforts," he said, smiling. "He has lately found some fault with the way I have rendered some of his ideas. I ought also to tell you that he has employed me a good deal in straightening out some of his business affairs, and that one of his plans is to leave me in charge of these affairs (more or less under the direction of Mr. Whitelaw) when he leaves Brockton. There are times when I think he rather tires of the novel writing. I don't think it would require much persuasion to induce him to abandon it for a time. At the other work, as I've said, I could honestly earn my money and yet have time to look out for more ambitious schemes."

"Ah, that is quite another matter," she said in a tone of quiet satisfaction; "but I don't want you to do this simply because I suggested it. You must see it is the only thing you can do with any honesty to him, or any self-respect."

For the moment, as she wished him a smiling good morning, Margaret Levenson was perfectly happy, because she was a good woman with a vigorous will of her own, who had succeeded in convincing a young man of the error of his ways, and forced him to acknowledge the force of her arguments.

It was not until she found herself in her own rooms, where she had a batch of household accounts to settle before she went to Mr. Doniphan's in the early afternoon, that the affair began to wear a somewhat different aspect. It came upon her then with startling suddenness that

for the second time she had interfered with her husband's personal affairs. Not only that, but she had done it in such a way that it was almost impossible to tell him about it.

In an impulsive effort to save him from something which would have made him absolutely wretched, she had entered into a sort of confederacy with one of his own clerks. Of course, when he had first shown her the manuscript, she ought either to have declined reading it, or to have made what criticisms she had to make *to him*. She had, in fact, attempted to do this, remarking with more than her usual caution, that while it was cleverly written, she did not think it suitable for publication, — not a word as to the obvious fact that it was not written by him. Yet she had got no farther when Leverson had snatched up his manuscript and departed in high dudgeon. She had not renewed the discussion, — it was so palpably useless to do so, — but this latter development had made it something worse than useless.

The whole situation was simple enough. Poor Margaret, after three weeks' trial, had suddenly waked to the fact that she could not share the advantages of matrimony with a man like Leverson, and at the same time ignore him. She did not know that a different kind of woman might have done it very easily.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BURNEY HOUSE

EARLY summer had slipped past Thallon almost unobserved. As July came within measurable distance, he woke abruptly to a consciousness that the prospective breaking up of the Leverson household had much more meaning for him than it would have had ten weeks before.

Despite Miss Laurie, who seemed to have taken an unaccountable aversion to him, he had adjusted himself to conditions there much as some plants persist in thriving under adverse conditions.

Of Mrs. Leverson he saw, of necessity, a good deal, — more probably than he would have seen had she not known something of his past through Mrs. Lindley. Perhaps, too, she was desirous of wiping out his recollection of that day on the veranda; in any case she did not again refer to his work, and he would have been much more lacking in tact than he was, had he not seen the awkwardness of the topic from her point of view. He appeared to be a young man with a good many resources, and such odd moments as the mistress of Elmhurst chose to give him she could hardly have put down as wasted. There was no question but what his presence in the house had done something to brighten it, and there was also no question but that it needed brightening. Owen Thallon was the source through which most of the news, foreign and domestic, filtered into Elmhurst. The Colonel had taken a great fancy to him, and, strangest of all, Margaret,

at the very moment when she felt herself drifting away from old associations, found this absolute stranger of a few weeks since more or less of a connecting link between herself and the forbidden world outside.

Thallon had long been on the best of terms with the Lindleys, and had lately struck up some sort of acquaintance with Reggie. It was during one of Leverson's frequent absences from Brockton that this confidential clerk of his walked into the Burney House one hot afternoon.

"I say, this is good of you," Reggie remarked, after they had shaken hands. "Clear those traps out of that smoking chair, and make yourself comfortable. You'll find a pipe on the table and some black Turkish in that stone jar. Why didn't you tell me you were a Penn Grad?" he went on cordially, as he slowly unwound the stem of a wicked-looking hooka, and struck a match. "I only heard it from Lindley this afternoon, and I've known you half a lifetime."

Reggie Gilbreed had by this time curled himself up among the cushions of an Eastern divan opposite his visitor, his mouth emitting little wreaths of smoke as he lay there, his handsome head pillowed on his hand, his elbow supported on a pile of Persian rugs.

"I suppose I ought to have known," he went on graciously; "I've seen the name often enough on the Hall rolls. Let's see—you must have left the year before I matriculated. Happy man! You just escaped Ferguson the Vengeful. He used to keep me up winter nights construing Latin verse which I've had sense enough to forget since. Fate's an odd thing, isn't it? To think we should have been hatched, as it were, by the same hen, though I ornamented a younger brood, and then have sunk together into the common misery of a dismal hole like Brockton. In the name of the beatific cherub who is supposed to watch over us, whatever made you come here?"

Thallon looked a trifle weary. He was getting tired of being asked this question. He had not taken the proffered chair, but stood leaning against a small table which occupied the centre of the room, fingering a long-stemmed brier pipe he had just taken from among its multitudinous collection of odds and ends.

"Leverson," he answered comprehensively.

"What! Not the clerkship! You must excuse me, but I really don't believe you. I've seen little enough of you, I'll admit, but I'll hazard some of my hard-earned money you're worthy a better fate than that. It's curious though how differently people look at the same thing. There's my esteemed father — wanted me to make a try for the place. Fancy my writing Leverson's letters and taking down his poetry from dictation. My disposition may be kindly, but there's a limit even to my endurance. With you it may be different. Madge tells me you've made a success of it."

"Did Mrs. Leverson say that?" Mr. Thallon's indifference had entirely disappeared.

"Certainly! Why not? I suppose the thing lies in the direction of your talents. Anyway, you seem to have earned a breathing space. I didn't know my cheerful brother-in-law ever gave away anything, — least of all a half holiday."

"In one sense, he hasn't. He went off yesterday morning under the impression that he'd left me enough work to last a week. I think it rather difficult for Mr. Leverson to make an exact estimate on a week's work, and I confess I made no special effort to aid him in this case. I got through to my own satisfaction about noon to-day, wandered down to the Everett for dinner, and was wondering what I was going to do with myself when the thought of the Burney House suggested a refuge. What snug quarters you've got here! The place seems to me marvellously

restful. I suppose it's because I like beautiful things—beautifully placed.”

Thallon glanced as he spoke about the spacious north room which had once been the Burney best parlor. The ghosts of the departed Burneys might, perhaps, have failed to recognize it in the glory of those æsthetic appointments with which the perfect taste and seemingly unlimited means of its present tenant had filled it to overflowing; but it had a touch of its ancient primness and staid decorum lingering about it yet, in spite of its Persian rugs, its Japanese cabinets, and the hooka.

The pleasing jumble of old furniture and rare knick-knacks which filled this interior was not too prominent, but faded away into delightfully dusky corners. A small upright piano finished in black oak, with its attendant piano lamp of wrought iron, faced the divan, a litter of sheet music on the floor before it. A bookcase, but partially filled with charming examples of the bookbinder's art, was half hidden behind some drapery. At the further end of the room, toward which both men had turned their backs, a door opened into a wide, old-fashioned hall. Beyond, the open front door of the old house showed a vista of a rambling porch and a dusty, sun-bathed street.

Thallon had wandered over to the bookcase, and was handling with the reverential touch of a reader a dainty volume of Swinburne he had just taken from an upper shelf. Rossetti, the two Brownings, and a fascinating edition of Omar Khayyam lay beside them. A moment later he had laid down the Swinburne and picked up this limpid lyric of the mysterious East, opening it at random, and reading the first lines his eye lit upon, half aloud, half to himself : —

“The moving finger writes ; and having writ,
Moves on ; nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.”

"Hullo! You know how to read the Rubaiyat," Reggie put in delightedly, — "how to hold your breath on that blank line so that the last breaks like a roller on the beach. Isn't it musical?"

"Very; but it's wretched stuff," Thallon said as he put back the volume with restless impatience. "As if we were not always rewriting, always blotting out, the work of other men."

Reggie looked distressed and a trifle puzzled.

"Of course he's referring to fate," he began slowly.

"And what is fate? The action and counteraction of countless wills — the strongest wins. Who's to say which is the strongest will until we try?"

At five and twenty Thallon was still young enough to enjoy hearing himself talk like that — although at the moment he was completely earnest, perfectly sincere. Reggie, three years his junior, had never, in that sense, been young. He had never felt any desire to inquire into motives, to seek for causes, or to probe beneath the surface of things with a boy's anxiety to learn the "reason why." In his cradle he had obtained his necessary nourishment by the simple expedient of calling for it, and he had employed the same expedient to satisfy his more complex requirements ever since.

"Oh, I'm not going to argue about metaphysics," he said amiably. "I love Omar for his music as I love everything beautiful. My only quarrel with life is that I'm not allowed to enjoy it in the perfectly simple and altogether delightful way in which you are enjoying my curios."

Reggie's eyes were following Thallon as he moved slowly from one object to the next. An expression of gratified pride was discernible in their owner's frank, boyish face. If there were any side of the impressionable Reggie more sensitive than the rest of him to outside

influence, it was his dependence on the appreciation of others in matters concerning his own faultless taste in house decoration. He could stand, and had stood with equanimity, ruthless criticism of his best canvases, but no one had ever dared to tell him that his rooms were badly arranged. It was characteristic of the other man that he had perceived this almost instantly, and had gratified the whim almost with his first words.

"I'm glad you like it," Reggie went on with one of his sunniest smiles. "If you have time some day, I'll take you over the old house. I've got my sleeping quarters upstairs. After a fashion I've managed to make the place decently habitable, so that if I'm to be tied to Brockton, I don't see that I could have done much better. Of course my taking my meals at the Everett is more or less of a nuisance, but I get over the difficulty to a certain extent by dropping in pretty frequently at Elmhurst. To-day, Levenson being away and no yachting going on, I fell back on my own resources, which has resulted very pleasantly, thanks to you."

"You mustn't let me interrupt your work," Thallon said, turning his eyes in the direction of a heavy easel supporting a large canvas, which had been rolled into a corner, and a carved teak-wood table beside it with its litter of palette, brushes, and twisted tubes of color.

"Oh, you needn't worry. It's not one of my good days. I've spoiled everything I've touched so far; so if you interrupt me, your advent will be a positive assistance. By the way, where's Levenson gone?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Humph! He's not apt to be mysterious—leaky as a sieve as a rule."

"Perhaps so. Still I imagine there are limits to his confidence. All I know is he took the ten-fifteen down train yesterday morning, and I only know that because he drove

down to the station as I was coming up," Thallon returned with a suggestion of weariness in his voice again. "You don't mind my looking at your work?" he went on with more animation as he changed the subject. "I had an impression, received, I think, from Mrs. Lindley, that you were a landscape painter, but I see you don't confine yourself to that."

"Oh, I dabble in almost anything, as the spirit moves," Reggie nodded. "That head over there, painted a year ago, is the best thing I've done, though that's not saying much," he added with becoming modesty.

"Yes, I noticed that as soon as I came in, — that tall, dark girl with the fine eyes. You're fortunate to have found such a model in Brockton. Who is she?"

"Louise Dupré — a mill-hand in one of the shoe factories. You're quite right, an almost perfect model, but as cranky as the devil. I made that study at an hour's sitting and never got her to pose again. That class have a prejudice against it, and then it's hard to get them after working hours. She ought to have been glad to earn a little money, for they're desperately poor. Like his daughter, Antoine Dupré is extremely picturesque, but he has the disadvantage of irregular habits. When drunk, I believe he beats the girl and makes things generally unpleasant."

"I've noticed her on the street several evenings since I've been in Brockton," Thallon said slowly. "It's a face one doesn't forget easily. In her everyday faded calico, as you have her here, she's simply perfect; but when I saw her this morning at the railroad station in her best clothes, she was not at all impressive."

"In her best clothes? What in the world was she doing in her best clothes at that time of day?"

"She got on the seven-thirty train."

"Great Scott! She must have inherited a fortune. I

believe old Dupré claims descent from a long line of barons, and perhaps she's gone to claim the title. I've seen a good many women with titles who couldn't carry them off as well. I suppose in prudence she should have stuck to days' wages, though I confess to a fellow-feeling for her there. I've a prejudice against days' wages myself, and a sneaking belief that Louise the queenly was made for something better, wherein she doubtless agrees with me. What a delightful world this would be if we all had our deserts!"

"Perhaps some of us wouldn't come out so well. Here I am with a half holiday which I'm by no means sure I've earned," laughed Thallon, "all of which I owe to a judicious reticence developed by Mr. Leverson as to his whereabouts."

"I've never noticed the trait in him before, but there's no question about its being in the family," Reggie said gravely, relinquishing the hooka and stuffing a cushion under his head. "It's strong in the old lady, — Miss Laurie, I mean, — and was marked in John Leverson. But you never met him."

"If I haven't, I've made up for it hearing a great deal about him. Dr. Lindley, for example, seems to have regarded him as something quite out of the common."

"Oh, naturally! He consulted Lindley a good deal about the housing of the mill-hands, and Lindley likes to be consulted. Personally I can't say I loved him dearly. I think it came from my wasting three months painting his portrait the summer before he died. I never felt he treated me quite fairly about that. His going off so suddenly knocked me out of an almost dead-sure thing. Then later, when we'd had a chance to pull things together as it were, I had an idea that Ashton would want to buy the thing out of brotherly affection. Well, it was a disastrous speculation, like most of my little ventures. Ashton hadn't enough brotherly affection, and didn't want to buy it."

"Have you got the portrait here?"

"No, thank Heaven! I disposed of it a week ago — at a sacrifice, of course. You'd never guess to whom. Whitelaw, of all men, took a fancy to it, — offered me two hundred, which I was too poor to refuse. Of course Levenson ought to be ashamed to let it go out of the family, but as he isn't, I hadn't any choice. John Levenson, as a model, was nearly as erratic as Louise Dupré. From some queer crochet he'd got into his queer head he'd never sit until I corralled him for this particular canvas. He fought shy of art, even the inoffensive photographer who does you up nicely at three dollars a dozen, to whom most of his class succumb sooner or later."

Thallon seemed much amused, though also, as Reggie thought, a little disappointed.

"What could Mr. Whitelaw possibly want with a portrait of John Levenson?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, you know he was closely connected with him in business. I suppose he must have had some affection for him, though the affections are not exactly in Randal Whitelaw's line."

"He seems to have succeeded in suppressing this form of their expression for some two years or more," Thallon laughed.

"Well, he's made up for it gracefully. He came down here the other day quite set on possessing this treasure. Not that I suppose it's all sentiment; Whitelaw likes a bargain, and he's got enough artistic sense to know that when he got hold of this thing, he'd struck something as cheap as wall-paper. Anyway, he really seemed very keen on it; wanted even the photographs — some prints I had taken to send Levenson who was in Europe at the time the picture was painted — a sort of advertising card which brought in no returns."

Thallon had been filling his brier pipe as his entertainer

rambled on, a smile of appreciation softening the rather hard lines of his square jaw, but at this juncture a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He set down the pipe unlighted, and looked across at Reggie with noticeably heightened interest.

"I should really have liked to have seen it," he said slowly. "Did Mr. Whitelaw take all the photographs?"

"As far as I know. I rummaged round and gave him all I could find. His interest in the thing was certainly flattering. Seemed to regard his new possession as a sort of resurrection of his old friend."

Thallon nodded his appreciation of the most becoming sentiment on Whitelaw's part.

"It was evidently an artistic success, a good likeness, and all that," he hazarded.

"Well, it hardly becomes me to say," Gilbreed rejoined with a deprecating wave of the hand, though he was evidently flattered at the other man's absorption in his work. "However, I don't mind claiming it was the best thing I'd done in the way of portraiture at the time, though that rough study of the peerless Dupré, done some time after, has finer feeling in it, because it was done with an altogether purer motive. The Levenson portrait was nothing better than a conscientious life study, and even at that I was more or less handicapped. The poor man insisted upon being painted in a black frock-coat with a high collar, which I imagine he must have inherited in the Levenson direct male line. Still, do his best, he couldn't spoil that head of his; crisp, wiry hair of iron gray, though he was short of forty-five, crowning a face which had something of the old Roman type about it,—rugged, yet delicately and sharply cut like a cameo. No one to have seen him would have imagined that the man stood in mortal terror of that eminent woman, Miss Laurie, though I happen to know he did."

"You pique my curiosity," Thallon said, taking up the pipe again, and reaching across the table toward a bronze monster, whose wide-open jaws obligingly disgorged matches. "I must ask Mr. Whitelaw to let me see the portrait as you have no more photographs of it. I've an idea that I shall like it much better than your Louise Dupré."

Thallon's eyes were fixed moodily on the portrait of the girl, Gilbreed's on the face of his visitor, in a lazy effort to make out this curious enthusiasm for a work of art the critic had not as yet been permitted to see, when at that mention of the name a low hissing sound, like the sharp indrawing of human breath, caused both young men to turn abruptly toward the door behind them, from whence it came.

"Ah! Louise Dupré. Who it iss makes talk av Louise Dupré?"

The spoken words, and the figure in the doorway, which seemed responsible for them, were both startling enough, preceded as they had been by no warning footsteps in the little hall beyond, and were doubly startling that their harsh abruptness had something sinister and hostile about it.

Reggie was naturally the first to adjust himself to this unforeseen interruption, changing the object of his speculations so easily that he seemed to drop every vestige of interest in the Levenson portrait on the advent of this new apparition.

"Why, it's Dupré!" he exclaimed, swinging himself into a sitting posture, "come in answer to my prayers to sit for that masterpiece that is to make our names go down the ages in a blaze of crimson glory. But who's the other gentleman?"

The owner of the foreign voice, whose sharp features were not rendered more engaging by a grizzled mustache

and goatee nearly concealing the mouth, was standing in the doorway, his shabby, soft felt hat drawn down over his brows in defiance of good manners. Directly behind him a second figure had caught Reggie's attention in the brighter light of the old hall; a commanding figure, in curious contrast to the repulsive ugliness of the French Canadian, on whose shoulder he laid a gently restraining hand as he came forward in answer to Reggie's question.

"You will excuse our abruptness," he said in a clear, though carefully modulated voice, as, hat in hand, he bowed slightly to the two gentlemen, "but your hall is so softly carpeted, and this room is so beautiful, that one enters it quietly as if in the presence of sacred things. It is a place for beautiful thoughts. You must be very happy here," he added simply, letting his eyes wander dreamily from the soft color of the Eastern rugs to the nasturtiums in the window. Then, suddenly, and with a visible effort, he seemed to put the mood behind him. Dreamer of beautiful dreams he might be, but he was something more. The gray eyes were very serious, almost stern, as he turned them upon the owner of all this luxury.

"The object of our visit, sir, is a sad and very pressing one, or we would not interrupt you," he went on with perfect courtesy, though in a crisper tone. "To be brief, my friend here, Antoine Dupré, is in great trouble through the disappearance since last night of his daughter Louise. I am assisting him in his search. An hour ago it occurred to him that as at one time she had sat here to be painted, she might again have come for the same purpose. The question is answered almost in the asking—she is not here."

"Vy make you soo sur' ov dat?" the small man here broke in with the rapid eagerness of speech so far characteristic of him, the eagerness of an ill-suppressed passion, of an active hostility kept with difficulty within bounds.

"He will not as yet haf said she vas not here, even now it vas dis odder gentleman use her name. Vy?"

"We were speaking of the portrait yonder, which your friend just now referred to," Thallon said, finding the man's intensely brilliant eyes fixed on him in an imperative demand for an explanation which Reggie for the moment seemed inclined to ignore. "Perhaps I can—"

"We can help you in nothing, except by a few suggestions dictated by common sense—" Reggie here broke in with a brusqueness most unusual with him. "The girl is either in Brockton, in which case you will doubtless see her by night, or she has left it by one of two possible ways. Of course you've had the sense to inquire at the railway station?"

"Directly she was missed,—that is to say, late this morning," Dupré's companion answered promptly while he fixed his eyes searchingly on the artist's face. "She has not been seen or, at least, recognized there."

"There are two river boats; she might have gone either up or down the river."

"Both have been tried with the same result."

"Then why worry? She could not have gone downstream on a lumber tow without attracting attention, and she could not have walked without being almost certain to meet some one she knew. She is probably safe in Brockton and will turn up when she gets ready. If I know anything of Louise Dupré, she is a young woman who prefers to consult her own convenience as to her movements. If my memory doesn't very much mislead me, this is not the first time she has absented herself without asking permission."

"You are a devil!" Dupré snorted, glaring at the boy savagely. "But what you say iss true; she go off once befo' an' I beat her, an' she swear she nevar do it aga'n. How you know dat?"

"You're not at all polite, so that it's quite enough that I do know it," Reggie returned, recovering his usual ease of manner under the stimulus of this attack. "In spite of my being a devil, as you put it so gracefully, I sincerely wish I could assist you in your search, but owing to circumstances quite beyond my control, unhappily I can't. And now," he went on, dismissing the glowering Dupré with an airy wave of the hand and addressing his companion directly for the first time, "I really would like to know your name. Your face is new to me, and I know most faces about Brockton. If I'm not much mistaken, you're a new-comer. I myself have been away some months and only returned lately."

"My name is Meyer, sir,—Johann Meyer."

The answer was simplicity itself, but there was a significance in its very simplicity, as he kept his quiet eyes fixed on the face of this glib-spoken young man. Thallon, who was watching them both closely, saw Reggie's face flush under the look. He was apparently much less at his ease in confronting this mild-eyed, gentle stranger than with the tempestuous Dupré.

Thallon, for his part, made no effort to come to the boy's assistance. He had, with obvious purpose, been put out of the game, and he could now very well afford to see the rest of it played out without any interference from him.

"Behol', den ve go," Dupré here remarked with a dramatic gesture and that persistent defiance in the intonation of his harsh voice which implied that if he liked he should come back again. "You haf not seen — you do not know? Bah! Yet some von haf seen — some one know. An' I too vill know — an' he shall rot in his grave; but I vill haf de truf from him!"

Again Dupré's words, quite unintentionally on his part, seemed to have the effect of putting Reggie at his ease,

though he had dropped his usual levity. His answer, though hopeful, was serious enough.

"I wouldn't go and put a painful construction on this thing," he said in French. "It's the worst service you could do your daughter—a young woman I, for one, hold in high respect. Search for her urgently, by all means, and if I can help you, command me, but draw no hasty conclusions, mention no names, and breathe no threats. They can do neither her nor you any good, believe me."

Antoine Dupré received this admonition with a snort of angry impatience. Meyer's face, on the contrary, lit up with a soft light as he nodded his fine head in acquiescence. Thallon, as he noted the touch of quiet dignity in the boy's manner, as remote from his usual easy levity as light from darkness, shot him a glance very nearly akin to admiration. If he were playing a part, he was certainly playing it well. In any case, this last remark of his seemed to leave nothing more to be said. With a courtesy he could not have exceeded had he been ushering out some of his best customers, Reggie saw the visitors to the door, Dupré still in untamed savagery, Meyer quiet as usual, but, as Reggie thought, with a questioning look in the depths of those deep gray eyes of his.

At the door the preacher glanced significantly at the figure of the elder workman who had preceded them down the gravel walk to the gate over which he now leaned listlessly while he waited for his companion.

"You must not judge him harshly," Meyer said in a low voice; "the child was everything to him. He has not learned to suffer patiently—is quick to place his wrongs at the door of another class. You were right in warning him against that—but—is the right all on one side?"

"How can I tell?" Gilbreed answered absently, for, in truth, this man's presence had its fascination for him, which held him in spite of his desire to be quit of the

subject still omnipresent in the preacher's thoughts. "All I know is it's a class *he* very cordially hates."

"Yes. God forgive us, there is still hatred between man and man — the survival of a time of struggle which should have been long past by now," Meyer said slowly, his eyes still upon Dupré. "Well, the field is large and there are few workers, but the turning is in sight and the end, praise God, is sure! The Power which makes for righteousness never sleeps. Let each do but a modicum of his share and even we might see God."

If the words had been in the Hebrew tongue, which would have suited their deep-toned earnestness, they could not have been less intelligible to the boy. They moved him solely by their cadence, as he would have been moved by the tones of a great organ. The artist in him was thrilling with emotion as he stood there on the porch of the old Burney House looking down upon this man.

A shaft of brilliant sunshine just touched the dark brown hair as he raised his hat respectfully at parting. It seemed to crown the head like a nimbus, to frame the entire face in a soft halo, as it played here and there through the wavy, reddish beard, making little waves of warm, rich color.

"What a beautiful idea," the boy said, coloring with pleasure, "and how charmingly you carry it out! Some day I want you to let me paint you."

"You feel the beauty of the thought, yet it is not real to you," Meyer said searchingly, ignoring the request.

"Real! How can pure poetry ever be real?" the boy answered, smiling. "Our most charming fancies would tire us in a day if we really believed in them."

"God does not wait for us even to believe in Him before He leads us," Meyer said wistfully. "He not only gives us infinite love, but infinite patience."

The man paused as if for some response; then, with a

slight gesture, not of impatience but of relinquishment, as if he knew further words were useless, he turned to go.

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness, and wish you all success in your beautiful calling. Good day," he said gravely.

That overpowering desire to paint him as he stood there had such possession of Reggie's artistic soul, that for the moment he forgot everything else. If he had longed to paint Dupré as the personification of some avenging passion, the face before him appealed to him as the realization of some great redeeming beauty. The man had actually gone before he realized that he had stared him out of the house in stupid silence without any acknowledgment of his parting salutation. He shook himself together with an effort, trying to concentrate his mind on the object of the preacher's visit and the part he had given himself to play in it. Like most impressionable people, Reggie had the faculty of throwing himself from the fervor of one absorbing situation into the pleasing intricacies of the next.

CHAPTER XIV

PIETY AND WIT

WHEN Reggie got back into the long room under the north light, he seemed to have quite recovered his usual careless manner, to have left behind him all that warmth of poetic fancy in the torrid zone of the front porch. He glanced at Thallon, wondering what conclusion he might have reached as to his own purpose in the late passage at arms, but that gentleman was far too much a man of the world to gratify his curiosity. He politely ignored an episode of which he had been an involuntary witness, leaving his host at liberty to ignore it likewise should he be so disposed.

"I haven't been rummaging," he began cheerfully, holding up a small white object from his place on the other side of the table, — "at least, not much. I found it underneath this pile of books."

"Blessings on us, what is it?" Reggie asked, not without a touch of weariness.

"A photograph of the Levenson portrait. It's distinctly good; you've caught the pose of the head and the set of the shoulders especially well."

This remark struck Reggie as a second well-meant inanity, but he had other things on his mind and so let that pass. Thallon moved over into the strongest light of the great north window, all his quick, energetic movements in sharp contrast to the dejected listlessness of his entertainer. He was holding the small piece of cardboard at arm's-

length, his face slightly flushed, evidently intensely interested.

"I'm very glad to have seen it," he went on, without looking up. "I could not have afforded to have bought the picture, but I'd really like to buy this if you won't take the suggestion as an impertinence. I've taken a great fancy to it; can't you be prevailed upon to part with it?"

Reggie had crossed the room and was now glancing over Thallon's shoulder in reawakening curiosity.

"Perhaps you're right," he said deprecatingly, screwing up one eye. "The thing tones better in the photograph than in the portrait. The canvas itself lacks color. I'm almost sorry I've sold the thing to Whitelaw. It would have served Leverson right if I'd had it hung in the Town Hall. Couldn't have done it through the Colonel, because his engineering the job would have smelt of corruption, but I might have done something through Lindley. Well, — it's too late now. Whitelaw's got his grip on it, and it's not a grip that ever loosens."

There was a curious snap in Thallon's eyes.

"He can have what he's got and welcome," he remarked, his eyes still on the photograph. "What I want is this little print. You must let me have it on any consideration you choose to mention."

"Oh, as far as I go, you're welcome to it, as you've taken the trouble to find it," Reggie said. "Strictly speaking, I suppose it belongs to Whitelaw, as the owner of the portrait. As you like it so much, I wish you had that also. As for paying me for it, that's quite out of the question. This is strictly a wholesale house, we give away samples. Be sure and show it to Mrs. Lindley to convince her I 'do portraits.'"

"As you will then," Thallon laughed, as he slipped the photograph into the breast pocket of his coat.

He seemed absurdly pleased, Reggie thought, over this modest acquisition. Reggie's own mind was very much absorbed at the moment with something of much greater importance, — a matter about which he would not, perhaps, have sought the other man's confidence had providence or fate not already landed him halfway into it. Reggie did a good many things by halves, but his confidences were usually thorough. Besides, he had taken a great fancy to this young fellow, within a year or two of his own age, and above and beyond all, he sadly needed advice.

"If you don't mind, I think it's as well not to mention this Dupré escapade," he began abruptly. "I suppose you think it odd, my cutting you short when you were starting them on the right track. I'll admit it did seem rather brutal."

"I've no doubt you had excellent reasons for it, though your having them doesn't really concern me," Thallon remarked with caution. He had glanced curiously at Reggie, at his first mention of the name.

"Perhaps you have as little doubt what they are."

"You do my powers of penetration more than justice. I could, of course, imagine several motives; it did not strike me as necessary I should choose between them."

"You are certainly chivalrous! Under like circumstances, in your place I should either have looked for some explanation or have drawn conclusions not altogether flattering."

"As long as you care to mention it, let me be perfectly frank," Thallon answered, smiling. "I'll admit that for an instant an explanation occurred to me which was not at all flattering to you. It was nothing more than an impulse of the moment — I rejected it almost instantly."

"Why?"

"Because, on second thought, you don't come up at all to my idea of a rascal."

"Thanks! And that leaves you face to face with a second conclusion hardly less disagreeable."

"I can only think of one other man you would go great lengths to shield."

"It isn't the other man," Reggie said in a voice so strained that Thallon hardly recognized it as his. "It's the other woman!"

Thallon started and took an involuntary step toward the speaker. There was a perceptible pause before he answered.

"If any silence or any words of mine can help you there, you can count them wholly at your service."

"It's not a subject one usually cares to discuss," Reggie returned with a touch of embarrassed apology. "But it's useless to ignore the thing with you. You could hardly spend six weeks in the Levenson household without penetrating the Gilbreed mistake. The only thing that surprises me is that you should care."

"In a way it surprises me; I'm a cold stick, wrapped up in my own interests, my own aims. Yet there are limits. Sacrifices we can hardly see carried to a logical consummation, standing by in cold blood like a Greek chorus chanting an appropriate accompaniment. You, of course, have felt this instinctively,—could not fail to feel it,—holding, as you do, the privilege of defending her. Well, you've not been found wanting. You've already taken the first step to shield her."

"And of what earthly use? We've tied her to him hand and foot out of pure selfishness, and now I sit down and cry about it. Of course I was too young at the time to realize the full significance of what she was asked to do, but there's no use playing the baby act. I've profited by the connection ever since, and would have profited more if I could. Oh, my God, what a brute I am!" poor Reggie ended with a groan.

"The moving finger writes ; and having writ,
Moves on ; nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wipe out a word of it."

Thallon quoted, smiling. "But you see I'm not a fatalist and believe in struggling. That man Meyer probably would fall back on his piety ; I instinctively use my wits. The thing is very far from hopeless. Let me help you."

He instinctively held out his hand. Reggie grasped it, noticing how cool and firm it felt, — his own hand shook so disgustingly.

"I'm not acting on mere suspicion," he went on hurriedly, pouring into Thallon's ear facts he might have hesitated long before sharing with his own father — so completely had this newcomer taken possession of him. "Of course no one ever supposed him to be immaculate. There are always things which one has to shut one's eyes to with a man like that. Heaven knows, I'm not straight-laced, nor are we male Gilbreeds especially noted for putting too fine a point on our morals ; but there are things we don't do, nor like done in too close touch with us. No ! But this of all things — and in a town like Brockton where his wife's family have lived all their lives — where the very walls of his own house would ring with it ! My God, Thallon, there's only one thing to do ! Thrash him ! And I'll do it, too !"

A humorous picture of the ponderous Leverson being thrashed by the light-limbed, graceful Reggie, relieved for the instant the strain on Thallon's nerves. Thallon himself, with his six-feet-two of athletic bone and muscle, — the latter at the moment so tensely drawn that his great bulk swayed slightly, — looked better fitted for the task, which might not have been uncongenial. He suppressed the smile almost upon his lips. It was so evident that

the boy was not bragging ; there was so much genuine feeling under his angry nervousness that it was, after all, quite easy to take him seriously.

"I wouldn't do that," Thallon said with perfect gravity. "To paraphrase your own words to Dupré, it would be the worst service you could do your sister."

"Oh, it's much easier to give good advice than take it," Reggie groaned. "While I was talking all that goody-good bosh to Dupré, I knew perfectly well if I'd been in Dupré's place, I would have killed the man. Do you think he *will* kill him?"

"It has got to be guarded against. Your first move was well taken. Meyer, I think, suspects, and so does Dupré, but he is a clumsy brute who, once off the track, will hardly get on again without help. I am certain he will get no help from Meyer — a man not likely to rectify one wrong by conniving at another. There is no other way out of it; you will have to trust Meyer."

"How can that give me any hold over Leverson? He's bided his time until my hands were tied, damn him!"

"How tied? I don't understand you."

"Because — because — I've been fool enough to borrow money of him," the boy said desperately. "I thought this thing had blown over; Leverson was at his best, and I was even harder up than ever. He told me a week or two ago that he'd had a run of luck in some business matter and offered me the money — twenty-five hundred. I had it from him just before he left and squared everything up, and he's got my note for it. Oh, I might have known!"

"You could not in any case have touched him. The man has a genius for shielding himself behind petticoats," Thallon put in bitterly. "But there are other ways of going to work, and work you must if this thing is to be kept quiet. Leverson's name is not yet connected with this thing, and it shan't be if you and I can help it."

"Help it! How can we help it?"

"Well, to begin with, there's the girl herself."

As he spoke Thallon instinctively glanced toward the portrait which hung on the opposite wall. The face which looked down upon him from its dark background did not look like a promising field for influence. The eyes were large, brilliant, and a trifle scornful; the lips, though beautifully curved, were firmly set; the carriage of the head was as unyielding as fate; there was no refinement in its beauty, but it was a face capable of love — and hate.

"She's the very devil," the boy said with much disgust as he followed Thallon's glance.

"She's a woman perhaps not altogether carried away by the glitter of the Leverson gold. Anyway, I'd try. You could trace her easily enough, for you know Leverson's city haunts, and you will have the advantage of carrying on your fight outside Brockton limits. When you've once found her, I'm much mistaken if Meyer does not prove useful. You can see the man's got their confidence, — papists, atheists, or whatever else they may be, — and if she comes back with him, it will be a better guarantee of fair play than anything else could be. It will not be necessary for you to appear in the matter at all. He can go by a later train and meet you in the city. Yes, — decidedly, — you must have Meyer."

"I don't very much like the idea," Reggie said, getting to his feet and taking a few restless strides up and down the room. "How can I discuss with a man of his class a question touching my family as this does?"

"For that you'd better thank the man who's made it necessary. If he has cared so little as to drag her name before a gaping public, we must do our best to shield it. I know no better way than this. Meyer already suspects; if we employ him, we insure his silence."

Thallon's frequent "wes" and "ours" passed unnoticed; he had so identified himself with the situation.

"Very well," Reggie acquiesced after a pause, "but I hardly know how to go to work. I'm not much on the pious myself, and I never know what to say to those people. Could you see him and tell him what we want?"

"Certainly. I'll go at once, while you get ready for the start; get a bite of supper at the hotel, and leave by the eight-thirty."

"And if we win, what good will it do—to Madge, I mean? The world is large enough and there are plenty of others. It's only a question of time before he breaks with her and disgraces her."

A curious expression crossed Thallon's face.

"I would not be too sure of that. If there's any break at all, it may come from her, not him. All I ask of you is to do the best you can now and leave the rest to me."

"I must. You've almost made me feel there's a chance of my doing something. But one thing's certain,—if I quiet this thing down, I'll have it out with Leverson afterwards!"

The boy spoke with increased animation. Suddenly his face fell again. "I haven't got over fifty dollars. The rest's gone," he said, looking at Thallon with comic despair.

"I can let you have one hundred—my month's salary," the latter rejoined cheerfully. "I know of no better use for the Leverson money."

Reggie went over to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Any one would know you were a Penn Grad," he said, beaming benignly on this new-found ally. "I'll take it in a good cause. I'm doing this thing for the best woman who ever lived, with possibly one exception, and if I succeed I shall owe it to you. Of course she can never know, —

can never thank you,—but you're not the kind of a man who cares for thanks. That's where you're stronger than I am; I do."

The boy did not notice that the hand of the other man, as he replaced the unsmoked brier pipe, paused an instant as if something in the remark held his attention. Reggie was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice it just then, and to all appearance Thallon's were quite on the surface when he took his departure a few moments later.

He left with the assurance that Reggie should have the money within two hours, and strode off in the direction of the Everett.

Reggie was late getting to the hotel supper room, where he found Thallon's place vacant. Inquiring eagerly of his particular friend, the waitress, he learned that his confederate had finished his supper and gone out some time since, and he further elicited the information that he had been writing before supper time in the hotel office.

Without knowing exactly why, he felt strangely depressed on hearing this, when, turning at the sound of a firm footstep on the bare floor behind him, he caught sight of the Penn Grad.

"It's in this envelope," the latter said without preface. "Do you get off on the eight-thirty as agreed?"

"Yes," Reggie said, taking the envelope with a nod and a little guttural sound intended to convey thanks. Then, lowering his voice, he asked with a note of anxiety new to him, "By the bye, have you got Meyer all right?"

"He follows you on the ten-fifteen. I only wish I were going with you, but as that can't be, good-by, and success to you," Thallon said in the same tone.

"Couldn't you come down to the station? You might think of something to suggest, I could absorb any amount of suggestion."

"I think not. The more quietly you go the less likeli-

hood of gossip, and no one knows better than yourself what to do. Detach the girl from Levenson, if possible, without his knowing your agency, and place her out of his reach under Meyer's protection. He'll know some place where she'll have some woman's petticoats to shield her. If she cuts up rusty, cut her adrift from Levenson at all costs, and let her go to the devil in any other way she likes. You'll know how to manage; but at worst, if the thing's prolonged, write, — and if I can help you, I'll come. Good night."

After leaving Reggie, Owen Thallon walked slowly across to the Brockton post-office and posted a letter. There was a moment's hesitation just before he dropped it into the box, for it was a rather important letter, written on the spur of the moment that afternoon. He was not completely sure how far it connected itself with this other matter, but in some way it had brought back to his mind Margaret Levenson's face — some fancied expression which had made him hesitate.

As he went back to the hotel, he told himself it was absurd. Why should she, of all women, question the purity of his motive in first coming to Brockton, — in anything he had done since? If she had known, would she not have been the last to condemn the righting of a personal wrong he owed to others, as well as to himself? By Heaven! Did he not owe it to her most of all? She had wrongs enough to right; of that there was small question.

But the argument was of no avail in wiping out that impression of her which had made him hesitate before posting the letter. Her influence was already strong enough for that, though as yet it would have taken more to turn him from his purpose. He *had* posted the letter.

CHAPTER XV

DANGEROUS GROUND

"I'VE come to take the babies for a drive," Margaret said, leaning forward a little on the seat of her pony phaeton, so as to bring her face more on a level with Mrs. Lindley's as that lady stood on the lower step of the Lindley piazza. "You needn't stop to get them into their best clothes. They look very nice as it is, and only need hats as a finishing touch. I suppose the older ones are at school, or I'd gladly take the entire family. It's such a perfect morning."

"Well, I do declare! You cert'nly *are* good! You don't mean to say you drove in on purpose!" Mrs. Lindley ejaculated, a puzzled wrinkle on her usually clear brow. "Of course it'll be no end of a help to me, Victoria being busy washing, as she always is on Wednesdays."

"Why doesn't she wash Mondays?" Margaret asked, startled out of her usual caution by this rank domestic heresy on the part of the Lindley household.

"She *begins* Mondays," Mrs. Lindley rejoined with that invariably amiable and explanatory wave of her small white hands with which she was accustomed to meet challenges of this character, "and she ends according to the best of her powers and resources, as the Doctor puts it, — that is to say, generally Wednesdays. So you see she's more help to me the rest of the week, when she's ironing."

"Yes, I see," said Margaret, smiling.

"As for the babies they're right here now," Mrs. Lindley went on, turning to those ever present infants who were closely following the trend of this conversation from the shelter of the piazza. "You'd like to go driving with Mrs. Leverson and a real carriage and pony, wouldn't you?"

The resolution being thus properly submitted, it was at once, and without any useless formality, carried unanimously by what might have been called a standing vote,—the electorate, until now seated on the door-mat, getting to its legs and howling joyfully.

Margaret's laugh, as she saw them carried off in high glee for what Mrs. Lindley called "cleaning-up," was very genuine. Within the last few weeks the girl had found several channels through which her own unrest could find some natural outlet. Her afternoons, still given unreservedly to Mobray Doniphan, was one of them; mornings spent like this were helping her wonderfully. If Ashton Leverson's frequent absences from home without any special leave-taking or explanation had added anything to her sense of relief, she had allowed herself to enjoy even that without analysis. She was very young and hope was natural to her.

After all she did not ask very much,—certainly not any brilliant career of her own choosing. Despite her vigorous will and her woman's love of influence, it was through some other will stronger than her own—if she had only known it—that in working out what was best in herself she would have worked most happily. It was there that Mobray Doniphan had helped her, though as she had never recognized the need, she was not fully conscious of this source of its partial satisfaction.

She had at least regained some of her old serenity. As she sat there in the pony phaeton, the smile which had faded from her face had left it very calm. The day it-

self was beautifully calm and still — so still that she started slightly at the sound of quick footsteps on the gravel of the drive behind her, followed an instant later by the mention of her own name, as the author of the footsteps paused on the farther side of the phaeton.

Her face lit up with a genuine pleasure quite new in her relationship with Owen Thallon as she recognized him ; he looked, somehow, so refreshingly young and vigorous ; he seemed to fit so perfectly into the spirit of the day and her own mood.

"You are really very much of a stranger," she said, smiling, without the prefix of any formal greeting. "I haven't seen you at Elmhurst for at least three days."

"I have been there every day inside working hours," he said gravely.

"Then why haven't you come in to lunch?" she asked in a surprise which was obviously genuine. "I did not suppose it was necessary to keep on asking you."

"I usually go without lunch. It saves time," he returned, not caring to meet those honest eyes of hers. Even she would know that his work just then was anything but exacting.

"I did not mean to press you," she said with a quick change of manner as she saw the flimsiness of his excuse, "nor to reproach you with deserting us."

"Wasn't that what you wanted me to do?" he asked, looking up at her suddenly and throwing more meaning into the words than they need have carried.

She was all kindness again in an instant because she saw something had hurt him.

"I thought it for your own best interests to begin work elsewhere, though I said at the time I wouldn't have you do so simply because I suggested it," she said earnestly. "I wanted you to see it yourself as I saw it," she went on, fixing her frank eyes upon him with undisguised in-

terest. "Do you seriously mean that you have been able to do that?"

There was still an embarrassment in his manner from which hers was so markedly free. He did not answer her question directly.

"I think I acknowledged at the time that you were more or less in the right about it," he returned slowly, looking down at the coarse gravel of the drive, which he was shovelling into little piles with the toe of his boot. "I suppose I put as much sincerity into my confession as most miserable sinners, and perhaps it's already borne more fruit than human repentance usually produces. Perhaps it's hardly worth mentioning, but I have started some small outside interests, and my work at Elmhurst now is reduced to purely clerical lines."

Though he spoke slightly in this reference to himself, the irony of his tone was rather forced than natural, an undercurrent of intense seriousness, — something which was almost an appeal for her continued interest caught her quick ear in spite of it. Owen Thallon, no less in his weakness than at his best, was the kind of man she could understand.

"I think you have been very wise," she said slowly, for she was weighing her words, anxious to thank him without bringing in any further discussion of her husband's affairs.

"May I ask about this new venture?"

"Surely you if any one," he said, dropping all pretence and answering her tone as well as her words. "It's some newspaper work I got from Ridley of the *Transcript*, — a series of articles on Labor and Politics, — more likely, I'm afraid, to suit that radical publication than your taste in such matters, Mrs. Levenson. I brought the last one down this morning to consult the Doctor as to its availability. The Doctor's been very good to me, as you know."

Without meaning it he had touched the girl's sensitive conscience.

"He had faith in you from the first," she said wistfully, thinking of her own caustic criticism, and how Thallon had repaid it with an honest effort to place his life on what she had considered better lines.

It was such a gracious thing to have done — an act of chivalrous, masculine homage which touched her the more nearly because it was so new to her. In her twenty years of life she had not lacked admiration from many different men, but none of them had ever done this one thing.

Thallon, on his side, had his own twinges as he saw the thought in her transparent face. He remembered Reggie's remark of yesterday, that he was not the kind of a man to care for a woman's thanks. He had let the assertion go without protest, but he knew now how untrue it was; the thrill of elation that was tingling through his nerves, as he caught the expression in her eyes, told him that plainly enough.

She had leaned forward, as if to add something to what she had already said, when they were interrupted by the opening of the Lindleys' front door and the appearance of Mrs. Lindley and her younger progeny, — the last named shining with infantile smiles and a recent application of soap and water, and gorgeously arrayed in purple and fine linen.

"I just couldn't let 'em go as they were," the faded little woman announced triumphantly, "so I had to wait until Victoria'd ironed out their white piqués. Ned's is a trifle damp in the back and the starch's a bit lumpy, so he'd better sit up straight till he dries, which won't be long when he gets into the sun; 'cause if he doesn't, it'll stick to his skin. Dear me! — I beg pardon, here's Mr. Thallon, come to see the Doctor, I reckon. He's got a patient in the consulting room, but he'll be through shortly. You might

step into the parlor and wait, Mr. Thallon, if you've got time."

But Thallon, who in all his numerous calls upon the Doctor had never submitted himself a second time to the enervating atmosphere of the Lindley best parlor, now made his usual excuse that his boots were in no condition to enter those sacred precincts, preventing argument of the point by vigorously assisting in the stowing away of the younger Lindleys on the seat beside Mrs. Levenson.

In the midst of the excitement attendant thereon (each younger Lindley being keenly anxious to drive, and each having to be accommodated with some of the surplus reins, which happy expedient devised by Margaret left them under the hallucination that they were assisting at that performance), he caught her eyes, which were dancing with the humor of the moment. Perhaps there was something reproachful in his that she could so easily have passed from her former mood into the Lindley comedy; but in any case, her face grew grave again, and she held out her hand to him at parting — something she had never done before.

"I wish, sometime, you would let me see the articles. I can't help feeling a sort of proprietorship in them," she said kindly.

All that was best in him seemed to come to the surface as he touched the firm gloved hand that was offering him her friendship. That hard, bitter side of him, which had been uppermost yesterday when he had spoken of Louise Dupré, sank out of sight — even out of his own memory.

Life to Owen Thallon had been little more than a hard struggle. Through it all, until now, he had pinned his faith on no one but himself. Things might have been so different if he had only known her sooner. Beyond that he did not stop to consider whither he or she were drifting, — conscious only of something in her voice and

touch which had moved him unspeakably, and responding to it instinctively, as a child might have done. Yet he was no child, except in the sense that all men are childish when they are most selfish. If he did not even then realize the danger which threatened him and her, it was largely, perhaps, because he shut his eyes to it.

"I want your help above all things; I was not even waiting for you to offer it," he managed to say in a lowered tone and hastily, for she had already nodded smilingly to Mrs. Lindley and was turning the pony's head down the drive.

There was a chorus of good-bys from the departing infants as they drove off which had to be answered by Mrs. Lindley, who was evidently in the best of spirits.

"Ain't she just splendid?" that lady remarked with enthusiasm. "If I ever said money'd spoiled Margaret Leverson, I take it all back now. Seem's if she'd just laid herself out to put me in the wrong ever since I said it. She's been down here any number of times this last three weeks, an' not to see the Doctor, neither, 'cause she hardly ever goes inside; but just to do little kindly things like this, to sort o' help things along. Now you take to-day, — it'll give me a clear two hours on the Doctor's shirts. They're going dreadful 'round the bosoms. The Doctor's awful hard on his shirts."

As if in answer to this challenge, the Doctor himself appeared just then at the front door, ushering out a patient.

"Now you mind what I say, Slathers." (The Doctor was laying down the law with severe emphasis.) "You keep better hours, take less beer, and leave agitating alone for a time, and your lungs will be the better for it. Take that stuff I've given you three times a day, and don't talk so much. That's my advice to *you*."

This admonition was so far acted upon that the man

made no audible response, contenting himself with a surly nod of acquiescence as he slouched down the foot-path which led to the front gate, keeping his eyes, in passing, fixed upon Thallon rather than the Doctor.

Though the latter had seemingly been absorbed in his case, his first words after the case's departure proved that he had overheard Mrs. Lindley's last remark.

"Don't you believe a word she says," he began genially, as he held out his hand to Thallon. "I'm not in the least hard on my shirts. It's the other way about, — my shirts are deuced hard on me. I see you've come for a pow-wow, which is so much the better, as you're the very man I wanted to see. As luck will have it, I've got another thirty minutes of office hours, and, for a wonder, no patients. Come into the sanctum and have a cigar. If the next patient's a maiden lady, I shall lose her practice, but it's worth risking."

CHAPTER XVI

COUNTER-CURRENTS

THALLON presently found himself in one of the Doctor's cane-seated chairs beside the wide-open office window, which commanded a view of Mrs. Lindley's flower garden at the side of the house. A clump of hollyhocks had pushed their brilliant red and yellow heads above the level of the sill, out of a tangle of sweet peas and mignonette just below. Among them a few bees hummed sleepily in the warm sunshine, though in the shade the air was still tempered by the freshness of early morning.

Thallon took one of the black, dangerous-looking cigars the Doctor offered him, turning it over absently between his fingers before lighting it. He was wondering why, if Lindley could afford to smoke such good cigars, he could not afford to keep another servant. Thallon, at the moment, was very thoughtful about women. Mrs. Lindley's being overworked had never troubled him before.

Although this moral awakening (to other people's shortcomings) was not likely to interfere with his enjoyment of the Doctor's tobacco, it marked an epoch in Thallon worthy of note. Three months before, when he had entered this same room as a waif and stray, without social responsibilities, the thought would not have occurred to him.

He had certainly made some progress since, and stood on somewhat different ground. This room, which had always been connected in his mind with that period, somehow forced him into drawing mental comparisons between what he had been then, and what he was now.

His train of thought was interrupted by the Doctor's handing him a lighted match, a transfer which requires delicate handling. The Doctor did this very well, but conscious of the flight of precious moments, he showed less delicacy in introducing the subject in hand.

"I see you've brought me up another article," he began, glancing at a roll of manuscript which Thallon had drawn from his pocket. "On the same subject, I suppose, 'Politics and the Labor Vote'?"

Thallon nodded as he lit his cigar.

"It seems the two first made some little stir at the *Transcript* office," he said, coloring slightly. "They've led to more than I'd any reason to expect. Ridley has offered me a place as a regular staff writer. That's what I've come up to talk about."

"Living salary?" Lindley asked, taking the manuscript and running his eyes over the first page.

"It could be made to do. Only about half what I get from Mr. Levenson."

"But you could combine the two," the Doctor said with conviction.

"I don't think so. If I take this, I've got to throw over the Levenson work. I've almost made up my mind to throw it over, anyway."

"I'd think twice about it. I wouldn't kick out of the traces simply because I was tired of being a nursery governess. You've done well by Levenson; everybody says so."

"You haven't heard Mr. Levenson say so."

"If you want Levenson's praises, you'll wait for some time. As you know very well, he never praises anybody. His keeping you on as he has is proof enough that you suit him. When do you find time to do this writing?"

"At night, mostly, though within the last few days I've had more leisure. Oh, I could do the work easily enough."

"Gosh Peter! Then why in common sense can't you

combine?" The Doctor never used this peculiar form of oath except when deeply moved. He considered it perfectly compatible with his moderate churchmanship.

"Why, don't you see that, as soon as I begin putting my name to these things, there's going to be trouble?"

"I don't exactly see what you mean by trouble. The articles are very much in harmony with my own views,—plain common sense with no touch of sentiment. A plea that the labor vote shall no longer be used by a set of politicians who flatter it until they get all it's got to give and then snap their fingers at it. I don't think that I've ever been chary in saying the same thing, yet I continue to work for Levenson."

"Not in the same capacity. I don't wish to appear rude, but if you imagine that Mr. Levenson would select you as his representative in Brockton, holding the views you do, you're very much mistaken."

The Doctor was not in the least offended.

"Well, I don't know," he remarked thoughtfully, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his forefinger. "My quarrel with Levenson has always been with his criminal laxity. I don't believe he's got stamina enough to have any prejudices."

Thallon smiled indulgently.

"He's got instincts. The instincts of a class who, in order to realize an income on their investments, are obliged to employ another class. Naturally, they regard that class from a certain point of view,—quite naturally, also, they object to any other point of view."

"My dear fellow!" the Doctor ejaculated, with a jerk of the head which was not at all indulgent. "There are a hundred and fifty points of view. What none of them will take is our point of view,—the working out of an ideal justice through a relative justice. The world is divided between idealists who want to coddle, and brutes who buy,

sell, and care not. Incidentally there are more brutes than sentimentalists."

"What is your relative justice?" Thallon asked, smiling.

"It begins with decent housing and ends with coöperation. By the time we reach that I shall begin to call it ideal. Oh, you needn't smile. The thing's spreading. Doniphan's got money enough to warp his judgment, but he backs me that far, though he's still shaky on the Trust question. Even Levenson, though he may be selfish and lazy, is not altogether illiberal. You don't ask him to accept your views, much less act on them; then why in reason should he object to your expressing them?"

"Much better men than Levenson will object to them," Thallon said slowly. "No one knows better than you do that when we refer in print to the existence of classes in America, we are immediately accused of stirring up class hatred. No one knows better the fallacy of the current belief that because we have a system which permits a man to rise from one class to another, we, therefore, have no classes. The men who have so risen do their best to widen the breach. Levenson's connection with the work bench is too close for him to enjoy any assertion of its rights and interests."

"It was not so with John Levenson,—a man whose hands were still hard with the use of tools," the Doctor put in with energy.

"Ah, that's different. He was actually in touch with it. For the greater part of the time you knew him he was still a workman with his origin written all over him. As you once told me, he tried to make his brother into something else, and he succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. The man hates the class from which he sprang with as much fervor as a man like Dupré hates the one from which he claims he's fallen. Mark my words, as soon

as Levenson hears of this newspaper work of mine, he'll cut the connection soon enough. It struck me I had better make the first move, — that it was a rather cleaner thing for me to tell him about it than to wait until he found it out."

The Doctor laid down the manuscript and crossed the room, planting himself before Thallon, his hands thrust deep into his coat pockets, his eyes, under their bushy brows, regarding him fixedly.

"Do you know you're giving up what you deliberately planned to do three months ago?" he asked, frowning.

"No. I told you then this place with Levenson was only a stepping-stone to something better, — probably something on these very lines."

"Yes, yes; but that's not what I mean. You had no idea of making a change like this within three months, — of getting out of one boat before you'd made sure the other didn't leak. What's made you change?"

Thallon did not care to answer this question, so he asked another.

"What makes you want me to stay with Levenson?"

"I want you to keep things there from going to pieces. It may seem queer, but I have hopes of Levenson if he could be kept in the right hands. The Colonel's are not the right kind of hands."

"Odd! That's what Meyer seems to think," Thallon ejaculated, dropping his usual caution.

"Gosh Peter! You don't mean to say you've discussed this thing with him!"

"Certainly not; nor discussed any other thing, for that matter. Nevertheless, I saw him yesterday under circumstances which made it natural for him to mention Levenson. He seems to have a great deal of faith in Levenson's ultimate salvation. He gave me that view of the case quite gratuitously, without my asking for it. It raised my esti-

mate of his sincerity of purpose. I can't say it raised my estimate of his judgment."

"That man puzzles me," the Doctor returned impatiently, beginning to walk up and down again. "Apparently completely under the sway of an emotional religion, he nevertheless arrives at results in days which it would take me weeks to work out when I'm at my best. His influence is growing rapidly; he'll be either a great help or a great hindrance to my work; I hardly know which."

"If you know how to use him, I should say a great help." Thallon was on the point of adding, "I know," but stopped himself in time.

"Anyway, *you* can help me," the Doctor said, returning from his own digression, "and you can help me best by staying as long as possible with Leverson. The very fact that you're in such a hurry to get away confirms my suspicions that they're engineering some sort of a scheme up there which goes against your stomach. It's the same thing with Doniphan. The only thing I can get out of Doniphan is that he's resigned from the directorate, and is going to sell his stock to Leverson, which, by the way, he wouldn't do without much better reasons than he's chosen to give me. He says his mouth's closed as he has his information through his former official position. I suppose the same thing applies to you," the Doctor added almost wistfully.

"I'm afraid it does," Thallon said, smiling up at his companion; "but you mustn't give me credit for being so very fastidious. My leaving Mr. Leverson has nothing to do with his business ventures. I want to start this other thing, which I believe will clash with his work, — that's all. You see, I've got to give Ridley an answer at once."

"I haven't asked you to decline Ridley's offer. On the contrary, I'm keen on your accepting it," the Doctor put in with returning impatience. "But it's not necessary to

throw the other thing up until it does clash. Tell Leverson frankly what you have done, and let him cut the connection if he wants to. Considering all things, your pride might be able to stand that much."

Thallon colored under this remark.

"Let it go at that, then," he said rather moodily. "It can do no harm to wait a few weeks. By the bye," he added as he rose to go, "in reference to this latest Leverson development. Has Mr. Whitelaw been any more communicative than the rest of us?"

"No, I can't say he has; but he's shown some genuine interest in what I'm working for. It was only yesterday he was in here to borrow a bundle of old letters which John Leverson wrote me three or four years ago when he was away from Brockton on one of his trips. They referred to improvements he contemplated making at the mills. Whitelaw thought he could influence Ashton in favor of doing something if he had the letters. Now I call that rather nice of Whitelaw."

"Very nice indeed," Thallon murmured.

The Doctor looked at his visitor narrowly. There were times when he found it difficult to follow this young man's mental processes. Thallon saved him the trouble of making any further effort in that direction by asking:—

"Weren't those the letters you were going to lend me? You thought I might be able to use them in connection with this new work of mine. A quotation or two from the source might have helped along the cause, or, at least, you seemed to think so."

"I think so still. I'd like you to see them. You might ask Whitelaw to let you have them as soon as he's through with them."

Thallon laughed rather unnecessarily.

"I can hardly expect Mr. Whitelaw to take quite the same interest in my work that you do, Doctor," he added

with a touch of kindness. "You see I've overstayed my time, as usual," he went on, glancing at the clock.

"Well, anyway, we understand each other," the Doctor said as he followed his visitor to the front steps.

Thallon nodded. "Yes, it's understood I accept Ridley's offer. You'll look over the manuscript and give me one of your best criticisms. In the meantime, I'll hold on at Elmhurst as long as I can. That's the contract, isn't it?"

The Doctor agreed, and so they parted.

While driving about on his rounds that morning, however, Lindley's sensations were not altogether satisfactory.

"That boy pumps me dry whenever we meet," he said to himself with some indignation, "and all the time he keeps his own mouth shut tight as an oyster. Gosh Peter! There's such a thing as being too blamed mysterious."

CHAPTER XVII

BROCKTON JUNCTION

ON the following Sunday Thallon felt at liberty to indulge himself in a long walk into the country. Though he had been to St. Stephen's several times since his advent in Brockton, he was by no means a regular church-goer, and his having gone there at all was perhaps more connected with the view of Mrs. Leverson's back hair obtainable from the free seats, than with any sense on his part of spiritual emptiness or any intellectual longing for Mr. Faucon's eloquence.

His impressions of the sanctity of the Brockton Sabbath were not enhanced just now as he strode rapidly past the closed factories, the more or less open saloons, and the swarming tenements, though he had formed no rose-colored visions of it before—rose-colored visions not being at all in Thallon's line, except occasionally, as we have seen, in connection with his own future.

As he trudged on over the broken and discolored flags, threading his way with some difficulty through a motley collection of dirty children who were using them for a playground, he was taking a mental account of stock, the results of which were not, to say the least, intoxicating.

Since his advent in Brockton he had earned something under three hundred dollars, of which he had lent Reggie Gilbreed one-third, a loan, oddly enough, he had not the least expectation or desire of having repaid. One hundred more had gone west to an Iowa law firm. The balance

had not been quite sufficient to pay his board, — even the very reasonable board of the Everett. There were some other obligations which would have to wait until the first of the month.

It was in the face of circumstances like these that he had yesterday calmly contemplated giving up the Leverson connection. There was, after all, a good deal that was plucky about Thallon. Probably no other man in Brockton would have planned the course he had on such resources. Even McIntyre who, metaphorically speaking, was used by Leverson to wipe up the floor, could most likely have bought Thallon out ten times over, yet the latter had, in a sense, won a position for himself which had its value. There were several men and women in Brockton who believed in him already.

A sensation of keen pleasure came to him with his recognition of it. He must have ardently desired this approval, for had he not in a way labored for it? In looking back, he admitted that he had very much modified his line of action. There were things which a little while back he would have done without an instant's compunction, which just now seemed quite unworthy of him. He knew perfectly to what influence he owed the change, — and knowing it was perfectly satisfied that it should be so. He had it in his mind to make her estimate of him come true.

He had hardly seriously believed in his new philosophy when a week or two before he had begun to write. Suddenly the thing had taken shape in his mind. The thought seemed to expand, to give him a wider opportunity; other people, perhaps, besides himself, had wrongs to right. Why not help them?

That a personal ambition, as well as a personal antipathy, was gratified by the prospect and had a share in his decision, he had admitted frankly to himself. In fact,

he could not, as yet, have understood any scheme of action which excluded them. We are not made over in a day.

His choice of a walk through Brockton's least pleasing suburbs finally brought him out on the Harrisburg and Brockton Turnpike, which parallels the railroad and rivals it in dust and ugliness, at a point locally known as Brockton Junction.

A dilapidated freight shed, with its rough platforms; a long line of coal pockets on either side of the double track, together with a huge water-tank, marked the Junction's ignoble existence as a coal-and-water station.

Thallon stretched himself on the steps of the freight shed after his five-mile walk, letting his eyes wander toward a hollow in the road below across a vista of tangled huckleberry scrub, some stunted alders, and a very muddy pond wherein a very ragged and disreputable-looking little boy was, at the moment of Thallon's advent, making some sort of a demonstration which produced a series of yelping protests from a very disreputable-looking dog.

The chief actor in this small drama was not so absorbed in his art as to remain unconscious of the arrival of an audience, and took the most direct means of soliciting its approval by bringing on the climax, while he rent the air with shouts of triumph interspersed with a cordial invitation to the newcomer to join the sport.

"I's drowndin' ut," he yelled at the top of his infant treble, the sweet innocence of happy childhood showing itself in a wicked gleam from out a pair of impish eyes. "Come down an' see ut kick, an' git a move on yer if yer comin'; for ut's mos' dead, ut be."

There was no longer an occupant of the station steps, for Thallon had obeyed this invitation with so much alacrity that before the words were fairly out of the boy's mouth, he had him by his ragged collar and had dragged the half-drowned cur on to the muddy bank by the bit of

frayed rope by which it had been neatly attached to a lump of railroad iron.

The rope being much tougher than the collar, the boy was loose some time before his rescuer could free the dog, so that when some minutes later Thallon stood up holding the dripping animal at arm's length, the boy was looking down on him in defiant fury from the higher ground of the station.

The boy was saying things not at all fit for publication. Some one was opening the freight shed and there was the whistle of an approaching train.

Still holding the dog, Thallon clambered back to his former position, the boy retreating before him, but slowly, as if determined to harass the enemy.

"What did you want to do that for?" Thallon demanded with a sternness not entirely unmixed with curiosity.

"'Tain't none ov your gol-darned business. Ye ain't got no call ter prig the pup out o' me. I'll break yer ugly dough-faced head fer ut, I will. Ut were my pup, ut were."

Thallon began to realize that even here he might be trespassing upon the sacred rights of property. He made a sign to the boy to remain where he was, — the only thing he could do, — for the Philadelphia express had just rounded the curve and was drawing up at the station with a loud hiss from its air-brakes, as if it were showing its disapproval of the low moral tone of Brockton Junction.

"Come back here," Thallon called, as soon as he had a chance of making himself heard, accentuating his meaning by a jerk of the head more expressive than words. It was perfectly evident that he expected to be obeyed, a rather curious self-confidence considering the circumstances, though it was presently justified.

The impish spirit in the road below had begun slowly to remount the bank of earth which led to the station steps.

The refined and exclusive Philadelphia express, in all the glory of its maroon paint and varnish, looked on with a contemptuous snort or two, as if it despised itself for the necessity, and was only anxious to get away.

The distrust in the boy's manner as he came forward was natural enough. It was plain that he understood this move only as a parley with an enemy, whose sense of honor was more than doubtful. He came forward, his eyes fixed uneasily on Thallon, his cautious advance ready on the instant to be turned into a retreat.

Thallon, on his part, for the first time took a good look at him. His round bullet head, protected only by a shock of ill-kept reddish hair, seemed too large for an emaciated body, its condition more than sufficiently visible through numerous rents in his faded cotton shirt. His apology for a pair of trousers, originally intended to reach the knees of a still smaller boy, were satisfied to accomplish half that distance on the anatomy of their present owner. If the child were ten years old, it was as much as he could boast, though the face might have belonged to a wicked old man of sixty, with its glittering, beadlike eyes, the only part of him clean enough to have any distinct color.

"Look here, boy," Thallon began as soon as they were within speaking distance, and not unkindly, considering his reasons for severity; "what will you take for this dog?"

"What'll gimme fur ut?" came the counter-question, the light of avarice adding to the beauty of the assassin's expression.

"This." Thallon tossed the assassin a small piece of silver, not at all with the air of a man who had very few of them to spare.

The assassin caught it with marvellous dexterity, bit it to see that it was good, and concealed it among his rags, all seemingly by one movement of his thin arms, the cur

meantime watching this transfer of his ownership with keen interest from between Thallon's knees.

"What have you got there?" the latter went on when the sale was consummated, and pointing to a bulging portion of the child's shirt where he was evidently concealing something.

The transfer of the money had greatly heightened the assassins's respect for Thallon; anyway, it had increased his confidence, for he now produced from its hiding-place the shining body of a small black snake and held it out for inspection with pardonable pride.

"Dunno what ye calls it; ther dog kilt it down th' road a piece. I saw'd ut," he went on in pleased explanation.

"Why, it's a black snake! What's that in its mouth?"

"Fedders! Ut had holt of a bird when th' pup jumped ut. I've got th' bird hid; what'll yer gimme fur ut?" this commercial genius went on with a keen eye to a second bargain.

"What made you try to drown the dog?" Thallon demanded, ignoring this last suggestion and returning to his first query.

"Ter trade ut down ter th' city. There's kids has 'em ter play wid; but this 'ere's worth plunks," he added, pointing to the dead snake.

"Plunks? And who'll buy that, pray?"

The assassin saw there was no chance of a sale here, so he answered the question with candor.

"There's a Gud-forsaken-fool buys 'em," he remarked scornfully; and then added with a touch of returning suspicion, "ye ain't a-goin' ter take ut off me, ye ain't; not widout ye pay plunks fer ut," and he gathered up his treasures and sprang back a pace or two out of arm's reach.

Thallon laughed, though rather wearily, as if he had be-

gun to lose interest in the wicked old man. The express had begun to move slowly ; the long line of cushioned chairs inside the drawing-room cars looked invitingly cool as he glanced up at them for the first time.

In doing so, he became aware that two people were standing on the platform just behind him, apparently amused spectators of what had been going on. The station-master, having closed his freight shed, was at liberty to amuse himself as he liked until the eight o'clock train was due from the west, but the other man — just alighted from the six-thirty — had no excuse for lingering. It took a good deal to embarrass Owen Thallon, but he flushed slightly as he took in the ludicrous side of the situation, and recognized in this late arrival no less a person than Mobray Doniphan.

For that very reason, perhaps, he made no effort to attract his recognition, rising to his feet and resuming his inquiries as if Doniphan's overhearing them was a matter of indifference to him.

"What's your name, boy?"

Putting the question as he stood there towering above the boy, perhaps gave it a less friendly ring, or, perhaps, conscious of an audience, the voice was colder. Be that as it may, there was a difference the boy was quick to catch.

"Slathers, an' be damned ter ye," the latter promptly answered, using the oath solely as an indication that he was on his guard, and with no unfriendly animus.

"Slathers," repeated his questioner, glancing at the station-master for confirmation, though he avoided looking at Doniphan.

"He ain't a-lyin'," the man nodded. "He's Sam Slathers's boy, but he goes mostly hereabouts by the name of 'Whelp.'"

"Pretty, and not inappropriate. Slathers senior seems

an attentive parent. As a matter of idle curiosity, what may his occupation be?" Thallon asked, smiling.

The question was addressed to the station-master, but the Whelp took it upon himself to answer it with evident pride.

"He's a Scorcher, he be."

"A Scorcher?"

"He's allers scorchin' ther owners b'twin strikes." This with an increased importance from the Whelp, the right to which was confirmed by another nod from the station-master.

"Labor agitator," Mr. Doniphan here put in tersely, declining to be longer ignored. "He lives a mile or so toward Brockton on this road. You may have seen him at Lindley's," he added, turning his shrewd eyes squarely on Thallon.

"Yes; I remember the name now."

"A bad lot, sir," the station-master volunteered. "You see Brockton's a mill town and some o' them fellers makes a sight more money agitatin' than they ever did at days' wages, though in this 'ere case the Whelp sees precious little of his dad's money as you can tell by the looks of him. Come now, be off with you, and don't bother the gentleman," and the man snapped his fingers not ill-naturedly at the Whelp, who thereupon disappeared down the road as rapidly as the conveyance of his numerous possessions permitted, looking back at intervals to make sure he was not followed.

Thallon was conscious of an awkward moment when, the official having departed toward the Junction's only decent house, he was left alone with Mobray Doniphan on the steps of the freight shed.

Doniphan, for his part, broke the pause abruptly, without the slightest embarrassment; apparently he was in no hurry to move on.

"That was a bloody-minded little beast," he remarked thoughtfully, glancing down at the dog which was shivering against Thallon's legs.

"Which?" Thallon asked, stooping to pick up the little brute which, though it was still damp, he tucked under his arm.

"Well, I referred to the boy, but the same epithet applies to your protégé. He killed the snake, and, if you go back far enough, the snake killed the bird. They're all necessary links in a curious chain of murder and pillage which comes up through these three so-called lower orders of creation into the welcoming arms of our human species through that small outcast."

Despite himself Thallon was interested. He had known well enough that Doniphan did not like him, and it therefore struck him as odd that he should make even this slight effort to entertain him. He had not yet learned that Doniphan could make himself very agreeable to people he disliked.

"I suppose you could follow the system in the opposite direction with much the same results," he said, smiling. "Slathers junior in his turn beaten and starved out of existence by Slathers senior, who doubtless stands in awe of some one who has got him by the throat."

"Just so," Doniphan said with a little snort of satisfaction, as if the prospect pleased him. "Now, what I want to know is why you interfered and broke the chain. I happen to know because I saw you do it. You deliberately, with your eyes open, purchased a life. Now that entails a responsibility. What are you going to do with it?"

"Going to keep it," the younger man rejoined without hesitation, though a moment before he had not been at all sure of it.

"Keep it?" Doniphan repeated with one of his inscrutable smiles. "Now just see how one inconsistency involves

another. You first break away from the system under which you have the luck to live, by interfering with the perpetration of a simple little murder. Mind! you haven't the excuse that you were saving anything of any earthly value, as values are computed; if you could, you would have the all-sufficient excuse of economy. Quite the contrary; while you have reimbursed the Whelp for his commercial loss, you have nothing whatever to show for your money except sentiment, which has nothing whatever to do with the system. Hence your continued inconsistency, multiplied many fold by your calmly proposing to give the animal at least one meal a day."

Thallon could not help laughing at the little man's earnestness. They had turned their backs on the station and were walking in the direction of Brockton, for it was getting late. He began to wonder what Doniphan was driving at. The little man's next words enlightened him on that point with startling abruptness.

"I think I've hit on your reason for doing it," he was saying. "You're lonely, and you wanted something to take care of."

Thallon flushed to the temples. Had he been justly accused of theft he could hardly have looked more conscience-stricken.

"Well," he said at last, somewhat defiantly.

"Why, you see," Doniphan went on in a softer tone, "the moment we admit there is such a thing as love, affection, or whatever you like to call it, — I mean unselfish love, not instinct, — and admit that we need it, we range ourselves in open hostility to this life-and-death struggle, through which only the strong survive, — not the best. We go on struggling, of course, but against *it*, not against each other. I was down at Lindley's at dinner to-day and he told me about your articles. If you can work the *Transcript* into a respectable sheet, you won't be doing badly; why haven't I been told of this before?"

"I thought you were the last man to take any interest in me."

"I didn't say I had. I only take interest in the work, which, by the bye, won't be worth doing until you forget yourself in it. You haven't done that yet."

"I don't pretend —" Thallon began indignantly.

"Yes, but you must pretend, and then live up to your pretensions. It's easy enough to say you don't believe the thing can be made any better and so wash your hands of it. We've been given brains and muscles, I take it, for the express purpose of making it better. As you've been given your fair share of both, you'd better cast them on the right side, as I admit you've shown some disposition to do. By the way, Lindley's been telling me of your relations with Leverson. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all. I'm only curious to know if you agree with him about my staying."

"Not in the least. I like the stand you took immensely. It wiped out a first impression I had of you, which was no pleasanter for me to hold than it would have been for you to hear of. No, you were quite right about that matter, — you can't serve God and Mammon."

Thallon could not help smiling at this application of the text.

"I don't quite understand Dr. Lindley's position there," he said with instantly recovered gravity, though conscious of a certain pleasure at Doniphan's qualified praise.

"Oh, I do," the little man returned with his usual confidence. "It's not Leverson — it's the concern. Lindley, as you know, came as near loving John Leverson as one man can love another. He abuses Ashton to his face, yet he's never been able to give up hope that he may make him do something decent. When he learns of these late developments you and I are aware of, he'll modify his tone, and

that can't be long delayed now. Perhaps you don't know — Leverson's got back."

"Indeed! When?"

"This morning, they tell me. So you see things are drawing to a focus pretty rapidly. Some rumor of this deal must have got wind, for there are signs of unrest in more quarters than one. An ominous growl from the unions that their contracts with the Leverson Company are not transferable, an ugly bit of bad faith — to cap the other side — the way sharp practice always breeds itself. I'm down here now to see this man Slathers, the prime mover in all their troubles. I want to pump him and, if possible, find out what the situation really is. I wouldn't mind if the Colonel's little game were neatly blocked, but I don't want it blocked in that way."

They had been walking briskly along the road, Doniphan taking three steps to Thallon's two. The sun had long since set and the twilight was already fading rapidly. They had reached a point where a bit of straggling woods came down close to the road, and as they entered it they found themselves in almost complete darkness, save for a shimmer of belated daylight at the farther end where the trees stood out in silhouette against the sky, or a few twinkling lights on either side which might belong to human habitations.

"You'd better wait and go down with me on the eight o'clock down train," Doniphan remarked as they went on more slowly. "I've kept you back too long for the walk home, and this is an evil-looking hole, with anything but a savory reputation. You'd hardly believe it, but there's quite a settlement about here. Oh, yes, — I forgot! You must have seen it on your way out if you walked to the Junction. They call it Brockton Corners."

"Yes, I remember it, but I don't know the house you're looking for."

"Nor I, in the dark, though I've been there before in the daytime," Doniphan went on cheerfully. "The lair of that beast of ill omen, Slathers senior, I should call it, — sire of the Whelp we met just now. The elder beast doesn't trouble it much, I fancy. Only keeps this shanty for herding the female beast and the cubs. Spends most of his own time at the Yellow Dog, — that ill-smelling beer resort at the lower end of Brockton, the one down by the river. Now the great question is, — which light is the Slathers light? We might try this one."

He paused as he spoke before a pair of wooden steps which led back from the road up a steep bank covered more or less by straggling trees. A short distance up this bank they could make out the dim outline of a small frame building. Through a break in its shutters a streak of lamplight cut the outer darkness, making a clear view of it if anything more difficult.

"Who lives here?" Doniphan shouted at the top of his high-pitched voice.

For an instant there was dead silence as they stood waiting, then a door was thrown wide open, letting out a broad band of light, which fell full upon the stairway and upon Doniphan, who had already mounted one or two of the lower steps. Thallon was a pace or two behind him in the deep shadow of the road.

A woman's figure stood in the doorway, black against the bright light of the room. She had raised her hand to shield her eyes and was peering into the darkness.

"What-d'ye-want?" she demanded in no very cordial tone, and concentrating the sentence into one word.

"Slathers," Doniphan answered laconically, going up another step.

"He ain't in no fit state ter see visitors," the woman said deprecatingly. "His cough's that bad. What-d'ye-want ter see 'im fer?"

"It's the female beast," Doniphan said in a low, rapid aside to Thallon, without answering the woman's question. "Will you wait here for me?"

The other man gave a short affirmative in the same tone. Doniphan sprang up the steps and an instant later the door closed on him, very much as if the male beast within had swallowed him up.

Left in the outer darkness Thallon began to walk slowly up and down the road. The evening had shut in close and muggy; the air was heavy, as if from coming rain; the dead stillness was broken only by the shrill rasping sound of tree-toads, or the croaking of frogs in some marsh land on the left of the road.

Sequestered and ill favored, the place would have been depressing enough at any time, — doubly so in the fast-gathering darkness which was now well-nigh complete under the trees, yet the young man's spirits rose exultantly. Thoughts triumphant were chasing each other through his rapidly working brain. He was certainly finding his place. It was no small thing to have found himself, without a move on his part, in the confidence of a man like Doniphan. Could it be that Mrs. Levenson — but he rejected the thought instantly. If Doniphan had heard anything about him, it must have been from Lindley.

The dog he still carried stirred uneasily and he shifted it carefully to his other arm, — his right arm, — rubbing its ears as he did so with a touch which was a caress; something he would not have dreamed of doing before an audience.

The fancy took hold of him that this second waif and stray had somehow brought good fortune into his life, — anyway, he was enjoying in it a certain sense of fellowship as new as it was satisfactory.

A moment later he was asking himself what had made such a thing possible. Six months ago it would not have

occurred to him. Things had been desperately dark then, and there had been no room for fellowship. He had learned since that the struggle for a foothold, though the first, is not the only instinct of the race, and that there are more kinds of starvation than one.

He had learned that much from a girl of twenty, by the mere use of his eyes, and the knowledge that she could suffer as she had suffered had been a revelation. Strangest of all, this new growth in him had until now stimulated, if anything, that initial instinct which had brought him to Brockton.

Some days since he had done his best to shield her, even at the price of shielding the man who had wronged her. He had done so without much thought, either of personal danger to himself or of danger to his inherent purpose which included his own triumph and the other man's punishment. To-night it came upon him in a flash that this new tendency had begun to hedge him in. Looking ahead, down the vista of possibilities, how could he injure the man without injuring the woman? His attitude toward her did not shift on the instant, but the thought had come to him for the second time, an echo of his first sight of her at the Doctor's when the knowledge that Ashton Levenson was married had come as a disagreeable surprise.

It was characteristic of him that although he had felt deeply flattered by Doniphan's confidence, it had not occurred to him to return it. All his plans were set to his own ordering as he turned them over in his mind. Slowly pacing the dark roadway he had quite forgotten Doniphan, when he came to an abrupt stand as a shadow darted across his path,—a small shadow which paused for an instant beside him and was gone before he had time to realize what it was.

Yet a moment later it came to him, as if by intuition, that it must have been the Whelp. Nothing else in heaven

or earth could move with that marvellous quickness,—yet what in reason could have brought it here at such a time to speak to him, for it had certainly said something as it passed, though in a muttered jargon beyond his comprehension.

Thallon smiled to himself as he recalled the Whelp's commercial tendencies. Very likely it was bent upon another bargain, though why it should have been so niggardly of its time was difficult to say.

The incident had undoubtedly set his nerves on the alert, for presently he fancied that he again heard steps behind him, and felt some chagrin, when turning he found himself facing nothing more dangerous than a clump of stunted alders which had pushed themselves beyond their proper limits into the road.

Thallon was not at all the kind of man to let his nerves get the better of him in that way. If he had had any doubts about the wisdom of Doniphan's visit to this sinister locality at such an hour, it had been on Doniphan's account, not his own.

He began now to think it was time to look him up, and turned back toward the Slathers shanty, walking more briskly. He resisted the impulse to look behind him when a third time he felt that mysterious sensation that he was being followed,—that is to say, he resisted it when it first returned to him and for several seconds after as he walked steadily on. But when he got within a few steps of the wooden stairway, the sensation became well-nigh overpowering, and he turned again, though shamefacedly, prepared to meet some fresh proof of his own foolishness.

But it was too late then! Directly facing him a black shadow stood between him and the light of the opening in the woods beyond, and so near that he was conscious of touching it as he threw up his disengaged left hand.

Too late! Far too late!—for he saw only an uplifted

arm black against the light, heard only a whirring sound as of something cutting the air with lightning swiftness, before the descending blow had struck him, and he fell forward on his face into the dust and gravel of the road.

There was a sharp whistle from a clump of bushes farther down the road; the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps; the long-drawn dismal howl of a dog; and the slamming of a door at the head of the wooden steps. Then there was the flashing of many lights and the calling of many voices.

The Corners were roused at last.

CHAPTER XVIII

LEVERSON HEARS A GREAT DEAL TOO MUCH ABOUT OWEN THALLON

IF the mood in which the master of Elmhurst returned to the shelter of its somewhat irregular and disjointed roof-tree could not have been described as heavenly, the events of the succeeding day were not, perhaps, calculated to make it more so. When he arrived in time for a late breakfast Sunday morning, it was perfectly evident to certain expert interpreters of the Leverson weather, who still lingered over their chicken bones and egg shells, that something had "gone wrong" on his late impromptu pleasure trip; a circumstance not so out of the ordinary as the accompanying reality that neither Miss Laurie nor Margaret—the especially appointed guardians of his peace of mind—seemed capable of what Mildred Gilbreed called "making it up to him."

He had always been accustomed to find his wife more than ready to lighten any such period of depression without regard to any little misunderstandings which might have previously occurred, or any unpleasant inquiries as to the immediate cause of his "blue devils"; but now, when he found himself in some need of that kind of relaxation, he woke for the first time to the fact that it was no longer offered to him.

This discovery, far from putting him in a repentant mood, only had the effect of making him class her as among the principal causes of his own discomfort, which

was saying a good deal, for they were numerous and malignant.

He got away from the table as soon as he could, his appetite for the society of his domestic circle being no keener than his appreciation of the hot toast and coffee, and was bending his steps toward the stables when he came across Miss Laurie, already dressed for church, slowly pacing the gravel path which he must traverse in order to get there. She took his arm without any apology for detaining him, as was the good lady's custom when she had anything to say.

"I want to ask you about your book," she began with her habitual abruptness. "Are you doing any work on it?"

"Well, not these last few weeks," Leverson answered, softening. "There have been a good many business matters lately which have taken up most of my time, besides which Thallon has been too busy at other work for copying, but I hope to get at it again before long."

"Speaking of that extremely brilliant young man," Miss Laurie went on, making a little face, "I wanted to ask you if you'd noticed a waning of interest on his part in your literary productions within the last two months. You spoke of him as quite phenomenal in that respect at first. Does he continue so?"

"Why, really," Leverson began, wondering what the old lady could be driving at, inasmuch as she always drove at something definite, "that kind of thing can hardly be kept up like a machine, you know; there must be times —"

"In short, it's very much what I supposed," Miss Laurie interrupted in her crisp, businesslike tone. "Just about eight weeks ago this young man, who calls himself Owen Thallon, though he may be any one under heaven for aught we know, suddenly ceased to be of any practical use to you in a field where he had hitherto been

most promising, resulting in your putting him at other work, which, by the bye, you have always hated."

Leverson, still with an eye on the stables, here began to feel some impatience.

"It was just about that time that certain business matters I haven't time to go into now came up for our consideration. Of course I put him at that, and he's done more than well on the new tack."

"I don't doubt it. I only wanted to verify my dates," the old lady went on with something approaching a chuckle. "It must have been very soon after he received his orders from Margaret that this ideal clerk decided that literature was not your real vocation."

"His orders from Margaret!" Leverson queried in blank astonishment, dropping her arm in order to get a better view of Miss Laurie's face.

"I should judge from what Celeste — who overheard their conversation quite by accident — told me, that Margaret's reason for counselling him to drop the literary work was that the work itself could by no possibility be made fit for publication. In plain terms that it was unutterably stupid. She further gave him to understand that for the sake of his own reputation — literary reputation, I suppose — he had better take to work elsewhere, in which last, by the way, I heartily agree with her. Celeste was, of course, rather vague as to the exact terms, but there's no doubt but that they reached a complete understanding. From what you have just told me, I see he has lived up to it. It strikes me his docility is even more amazing than his genius."

If Miss Laurie had wished to arouse Leverson from any possible indifference as to his wife's actions, she had certainly succeeded. If, however, she had aimed at the direct dismissal of a young man to whom she had taken an unaccountable dislike, that was quite another matter. Even if Leverson had been really angry (which curiously enough

he had not the appearance of being), she should have known that his anger never interfered with his convenience, and dispensing with Thallon's services just then would have been a serious inconvenience.

To do him justice, it may be added that inwardly he was much more inclined to believe his wife guilty of a dictatorial interference in his private affairs than of any graver indiscretion. Suspicious as he was by nature of most persons about him, it required something more than the gossip of a servant to enable him to class a woman like Margaret Leverson under that head. To have taken any direct action toward her on such authority would have struck him as rather vulgar, though he might have roared out his disapproval of her in Morgan's presence if she had failed to sugar his tea.

Miss Laurie, though her manners were much more refined than her nephew's, had failed to appreciate this in her earnestness in following out her purpose, whatever it was, but she saw her mistake instantly as she glanced at Leverson's face, which, if it betrayed anything, betrayed a certain amount of grim satisfaction.

"I really felt as if you ought to know about this," she continued with less decision, falling back, as a great many people do in awkward situations of this kind, on her keen sense of duty. "As for Margaret, she is, of course, beyond my criticism, but I do not understand that you have connected yourself with young Thallon for better for worse, and the sooner you see him in more lights than one, the sooner you'll make something like a fair estimate of him. You may mark my words that he comes here for no good purpose, and that he has a much greater zest for the advancement of his own interests than he has for yours."

Miss Laurie's last words were almost passionate. No matter how she began with Ashton, she always ended, if she had any object to gain, in simply pleading with him.

Her shrewd old brain lost all its shrewdness whenever she came into personal touch with him, and as a reward, she was probably the only person, besides himself, in whom he implicitly believed.

In the present case she had at least the satisfaction of feeling that she had put him on his guard. If he were not likely to use her warning quite as she would have had him do, it was pretty certain her information would be stored away to come out in due season, — if he could find any corroboration of it worthy of being quoted. Even that was only conjecture, for she could get nothing more out of him than an acknowledgment of her devotion to his interests before it was time for her to transfer her devotions to St. Stephen's.

Miss Laurie's Christianity being ardent, like everything else about her, could contain itself with nothing short of two services on Sunday, while Mrs. Levenson, being less addicted to religious dissipation, only went in the afternoon.

As a large part of his morning had been spoiled by Miss Laurie, Levenson (who only went to church on Christmas) naturally looked forward to that Sunday afternoon as a period when he might reasonably expect to enjoy himself. This, doubtless, he would have done if it had not been for the Colonel, who took the inopportune moment when he had just roused himself from a three-hour nap on the veranda to re-introduce a subject of which he had already heard more than enough.

The vision which greeted his waking eyes, as he lay in the depths of a comfortably cushioned wicker chair slowly collecting his wits, was that of a well-preserved gentleman in a white duck suit who occupied a second wicker chair on the opposite side of a Turkish table. This table supported a cut-glass decanter, which, being unstoppered, gave forth a pleasing aroma, a bowl of like material partially filled with cracked ice, a water-bottle, a single tumbler

which contained a mixture of the contents of all three, an open cigar box, and an ash tray where the remains of several cigars lay smouldering.

Leverson recognized the gentleman and identified his own property on the table at almost the same time that he noticed the omission of a second glass. He roused himself to correct this oversight, and by so doing attracted his companion's attention.

"You've been snoring dreadfully," the Colonel remarked with less than his usual urbanity.

"If you'd been up the best part of three nights," Leverson returned, reaching for an electric button on the under side of the table, "perhaps you would."

The Colonel made no rejoinder to this assertion. Morgan, having brought another glass and mixed his master what he considered a proper stimulant, had taken his departure before the Colonel again broke silence.

"I really can't congratulate you, Ashton, on your choice of a time for taking a vacation," he began, pulling down his neat white cuffs as he was very apt to do when annoyed. "If you had stayed up three nights running to attend to your business affairs, it might have been more to the purpose."

"I really don't know that I require any congratulations," his son-in-law returned moodily. "I'm accustomed to working like a navvy in other people's interests and getting no thanks for it—not to mention congratulations."

"I suppose I need hardly remind you," the Colonel went on, taking no notice of his ill-mannered interruption, "that until we put through this matter of the consolidation, there will be a good many nice little details to arrange and a good many people to see, who are not likely to be satisfied by interviews with Randal Whitelaw nor the non-committal assurances of your confidential clerk that he has not been intrusted with your address."

"If Thallon put it in that way, he's an ass," Levenson remarked indifferently. "I supposed he knew enough to say I'd be back in two days at farthest — important business, or something of that sort. Even Morgan could have managed to say that much."

"You're mistaken if you put young Thallon down as an ass," the Colonel rejoined slowly. "If he were, your relationship with him would be very much simplified; which reminds me to ask if you're acquainted with some of his late literary efforts; I mean literary efforts on his own account?"

It struck Levenson that this was really piling it on.

"I don't care a — a rap about his literary efforts," he returned aggressively. "When I took him on, I understood he was more or less connected with journalism. I regarded it as a point in his favor, because I wanted a man who could give me points on the business part of the profession. I got him at a pretty reasonable salary, and very likely I gave him to understand that he was at liberty to use any waste time that was left over from his work here in making his own little fling. I suppose you're going to report that he's been rather liberal in his construction of the privilege. I thought very likely he would be while I was away. I'm usually rewarded for taking a kindly interest in my employees by being swindled in that way."

"I'm not worrying at all about his wasting his time," the Colonel retorted with increasing impatience. "Just at present I've rather larger interests at stake and, for the matter of that, so have you. What I did think you ought to know was that he has taken to writing leading articles for that Socialist-Labor sheet, the *Transcript*, and that they have already begun to attract considerable attention among decent people, which is something the *Transcript* has never succeeded in doing before. My suspicions

were first aroused by seeing Thallon going into Ridley's office one day last week. Later Higgins, who was down here on our business, called my attention to this thing I've cut out for your perusal, signed, as you see, 'T. O.,' a reversal of the young fellow's initials. It's not at all difficult to see its drift. It's a bid for uniting the labor vote with that of the opposition."

Leverson took the column and a half of newspaper clipping which the Colonel handed him across the table with conflicting feelings. In his present mood he would rather have enjoyed seeing the Colonel embarrassed in some of his pet political schemes, but there was a suggestion somewhere in that gentleman's manner that it might not be altogether to his own advantage that they should be so embarrassed. He committed himself by no comment until he should have more light on this all-important point.

"I don't quite see Higgins's interest in this thing," he said, holding the paper between his thumb and finger without reading it.

"Well, it's rather vital," the Colonel returned with a smile which had something of pity in it. "In strict confidence, I don't mind telling you that I've promised Higgins the nomination for Congress in the October convention. I needn't tell you, of course, that under ordinary circumstances it's the same thing as an election. We have a normal plurality of about four thousand in the district. The labor vote is anywhere from three to five. If it were united with our friends, the enemy, it's quite easy to see that the nomination which goes to Mr. Higgins would not be quite so valuable to him."

At this point Leverson rose in disgust, tossing the slip of paper on to the table. At no time in his long relationship with the Colonel had he ever felt such a virtuous indignation against him.

"Now look here, Gilbreed," he began sternly, and using

the name without prefix to emphasize his contempt, "I want you to distinctly understand that I don't mix myself up in your politics. Personally I care no more about Higgins getting into Congress than I do about Higgins getting into jail. My private opinion is that the last would suit him quite as well as the other. He may get into either for anything I care."

"My dear fellow," the Colonel observed, cooling as he invariably did under the other's heat, "personally I don't care either. The only question is whether you and I can afford to jeopardize the Higgins support at a time when that support is absolutely necessary in carrying out certain transactions to a happy conclusion. Of course I don't pretend I haven't political reasons besides,—don't pretend that I want to see the Fourth Congressional District go over to the enemy under my leadership,—but I assure you that's quite secondary to our consolidation interests."

"What in the name of common sense has that got to do with it?" Leverson demanded angrily. "The consolidation is a matter of contract duly signed by men Higgins couldn't control if he tried. We've only got to ratify the thing day after to-morrow to get our money. You know that as well as I do."

"You mean the stock—not the money," corrected the Colonel, with that aggravating smile still playing about his thin lips. "The sale of the stock at one hundred and forty-five, or any other figure, is not a matter of contract at all."

"No! We only have your word for that," Leverson sneered, too angry to notice his own contradiction.

"And a much better security than any contract you've so far put your name to," the Colonel returned coolly, though with an ominous snap of the eyes which might have admonished his careless son-in-law that he was going too far. There was nothing the Colonel more prided himself upon than the keeping of his political promises. As

most of them, from their very nature, could not be recorded in writing, his existence as a political entity was dependent upon his doing so.

"I made that promise," he went on with impressive deliberation, "under the natural supposition that you, personally, were not going to use your best endeavors to block my game. If you are, I may as well tell you now—before you have ratified the contract or in any way committed yourself to the sale of the Leverson Car Company—that my selling the new stock rests entirely with my keeping in with Higgins. I don't mean he can help me, but he can very easily prevent my selling it."

"What do you mean by my blocking your game?" Leverson demanded haughtily, though with a slight modification of the hostility until then prominent in his voice and gesture that informed the Colonel he had not labored in vain.

"Really, Ashton, I think what I've said might have made that clear to you," he went on. "When your confidential clerk undertakes to lead the labor vote of Brockton—until now placed by Divine Providence in a situation where it can do no harm—over to the enemy, and when you consider that considerably over one-tenth of that vote is from your own mills, I think you can hardly claim that you are personally indifferent to his election. When by these simple means you have reduced Mr. Higgins's little perquisite to something dangerously near an empty compliment, I think you'll admit the gentleman might feel, with reason, that he had not been treated in good faith. You ask him—or I do for you, which is the same thing—to assist in making a comfortable little sum of money for you. He accepts the trust, and you return the compliment by doing your best to ruin him. That incidentally you are doing your best to ruin ~~me~~ is hardly worth mentioning."

"Now come! Look here!" Leverson put in, not the more pleasantly because he felt that he was being cornered. "What are you trying to make me do? Dismiss Thallon just as he's beginning to prove useful, I suppose?"

"My dear fellow," the Colonel returned, warming immensely as he saw he was getting his refractory son-in-law well in hand, "that's the last thing I want you to do if it can possibly be avoided. If you throw him over, he goes at once into the arms of the opposition, who've been quick enough to see that he's got brains. Why is it he's so awfully close to Lindley — a man whose vote used to belong to the party, but who's lately become so uncertain that he's not likely to be retained as coroner after November? Why is it that Mobray Doniphan — who knows no more of politics than a nursing baby, yet whose long skinny fingers are mixed up in everybody's kettle of soup — has put up the money for Lindley to buy the old Watson Farm where I understand they're to build model tenements? I tell you I've had my eye on this thing for some time, and it's working beautifully. When the tenements are retailed without profit to the intelligent mechanics of Brockton, when the monthly payments are falling due and the honest working-man is being treated with every consideration, we shall be so near the millennium it won't be worth while going any farther. Of course all this won't be in working order by election, but it's quite on the cards that Doniphan may get the Democratic nomination on the strength of it. With young Thallon writing articles like that in the labor paper, they might succeed, and, besides, he's really too good a young man to let him spoil himself in that way. Now, naturally, we want to stop all this. I think (with proper management and some reasonable concessions) — I think I can prevent Doniphan's getting the nomination. That's my business. It's for you to detach Thallon from this unworthy connection and bind him to your interests in a way

he's not liable to forget. I think you can afford to raise his salary with the understanding that he gives up his entire time to your work, or—if he prefers it, and must air himself in print—there's my paper, the *Harrisburg Sentinel*. He was on that under the old management before I bought it out, and would have given all his old shoes to have got back on it at one time. I could give him a good place there, even in connection with your work, and I'll guarantee that if he's once under old man Neely, he'll do no harm to himself or anybody else. You really must make an effort in this matter, Ashton, if it's only to clear your own skirts."

CHAPTER XIX

THE COLONEL FACES AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT

THE grinding of wheels on the gravel below, and the rustle of somebody else's skirts on the steps of the side veranda, here broke into this carefully worded admonition and called the attention of both gentlemen to the arrival of the phaeton, which, in charge of the groom, was just disappearing around the corner of the house.

The suggestion of annoyance at the interruption, visible for an instant on the Colonel's face, faded away as his eyes absorbed a radiant vision in pink silk and Irish lace, which a moment later advanced across the wide floor of the veranda toward them.

"I believe you have both forgotten that it's nearly six o'clock and that the Faucons take tea at Elmhurst to-night at sharp seven," the radiant vision announced in a delightfully girlish voice which had a little ripple of laughter running through it. "Or still worse, perhaps you've forgotten it's Sunday. I came on in the phaeton, because the Faucon carriage only holds four, to throw myself on your kindly hospitality. Glad to see it's spiritual as well as material," she ended, glancing at the table, as with a little nod of thanks she took the chair Levenson placed for her.

"As this kind of refreshment is not exactly in your line, I should be glad if you'd let me ring for tea and cake, or whatever the proper combination is that suits the feminine palate," Levenson put in genially with one of his loud laughs. He was always gracious to Hilda Faucon, who at

eighteen was distinctly handsome, with the dark hair and eyes of the Faucons, though she had the irregular Doniphan mouth, with that curious little quirk in the corner which gave her Uncle Mobray his sinister expression. In Hilda it suggested only a delightful wickedness.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," the Colonel put in pleasantly; "they told me you were in Philadelphia."

"So I was; but I never promised to stay there. I came home last night because a Faucon cannot, of course, travel on Sunday. I was with the Farleys, you know, in Arch Street."

"Brent Farley? Grand Army man. Made his money in oil," the Colonel put in by way of identification.

"Yes, I know. Salad oil," Hilda nodded comprehensively. "Mrs. Farley makes it into delicious mayonnaise and they have it for lunch."

"No, no, oil wells," the Colonel corrected gently.

"Really! How awfully jolly!" Hilda beamed. "I always supposed that they got it by the bottle," she went on gravely, seeing the attention in Leverson's face. "Just imagine the old oaken bucket full of freshly drawn oil for lunch:—

The moss-covered bucket which hung in the oil well.

What an improvement on Woodworth. Reggie should have told me about it when he was there. We saw a great deal of him, by the way. What in the world do you suppose took him to Phillie at this time of year?"

"I can't imagine," the Colonel said, smiling across at her.

"Oh, it wasn't I!" the young lady returned with reckless candor. "He was there two days before we ever laid eyes on him. He *says* he came to arrange for the Autumn Water Color, which would be more comprehensible if he ever painted in water color, or the exhibition could possibly be arranged for in July. Between ourselves Reggie is not at all good at fiction."

As it was the opinion of both gentlemen present that Reggie was not especially good at anything, — an opinion which for obvious reasons could not be expressed, — there was no immediate rejoinder to this assertion.

The Colonel was not in the least adverse to a possible Faucon connection. Mrs. Faucon had had her share of the Doniphan money, and the balance of it would, in the natural course of things, revert to Hilda. Should it subsequently revert to Reggie, it would, beyond question, go where it would do the most good. The arrival of the Faucon carriage presently turned Hilda's loquacity into other channels — the entire party betaking themselves to the long stretch of lawn below the house which the sinking sun had by this time left sufficiently cool for comfort.

The Rector of the ancient parish of St. Stephen's was a tall, thin, and rather frail-looking man, with a finely cut, intellectual face, set in a well-shaped head — a head covered at fifty-five by a mass of fine iron-gray hair in sharp contrast to a pair of nearly coal-black eyes which shed a rather cold light from under delicately arched brows. They matched in this a rather cold manner, which became the more noticeable when he found himself out of harmony with his surroundings, as to a certain extent he did now, while sauntering across the lawn with Margaret, who was talking rapidly.

The Reverend Cuthbert Faucon, if he still adhered to the proprieties in occasionally supping with these very substantial parishioners of his, did so much more largely out of deference to his own conscience or to the wishes of that very positive woman, Miss Laurie, than for any pleasure or profit he ever expected to get out of it. In the secret places of the Reverend Cuthbert's soul, Ashton Leverson's nominal Churchmanship, which turned in a certain definite financial support to a parish always in need of funds, was much more a thorn in the flesh than the open backsliding

of his brother-in-law, Mobray Doniphan, whose contributions went elsewhere.

The thing which had come nearest moving him out of his usual calm placidity had been his niece's marriage to this young heir of John Levenson's money, — a marriage the announcement of which had vibrated through him disagreeably, as if it had been an echo of his own sister's marriage with the Colonel twenty years before, though openly he had no more opposed the one than he had the other.

Mrs. Faucon, whose sole object in life was to make things comfortable, had pointed out to her husband in the strict privacy of their chamber, that the marriage could hardly fail to have a beneficial effect on both the young people. It would certainly help to settle Ashton, whom even this optimistic woman admitted sadly needed settling, and it might very well be the means of reclaiming Margaret from what her aunt designated as too much books and star-gazing, which that good woman went on to remark was the direct outcome of her brother Mobray's injudicious encouragement.

At that time it had been a secret fear in Mrs. Faucon's ample bosom that Margaret would in time, if she went on unchecked, become more bookish than the Rector and her brother Mobray combined, — a blasphemy which she now had the satisfaction of feeling had been happily averted, and even more largely than she knew, through the influence of the Levenson marriage.

It may possibly have struck the Rector this evening, as he stood a little apart listening to what his niece had to say, that if she had become more properly conscious of masculine superiority, she was certainly no less ardent in the conception and carrying out of certain opinions she appeared to hold, on topics not usually considered discussable by women. He was very fond of Margaret and in a way rather proud of her, but she was certainly too startling

in her opinions, and there were times when he wished she were not quite so insistent, a quality, however, it seemed useless to combat, seeing that her marriage with Leverson had not sufficed to take that out of her along with her other blemishes.

"It seems to me a horrible thing," she was saying, her eyes bright with suppressed excitement. "The man Dupré was here last Wednesday to see Ashton, who, as you know, was away at the time. He seemed absurdly possessed with the idea that Ashton could help him to find his daughter. He was very much excited, almost incoherent, talking at the top of his voice in his very bad French and worse English."

"If he wants to keep his daughter's name out of the papers, that was very unwise of him. The story may easily get into less scrupulous hands than ours," her uncle said in a tone tinged with a shade of disgust.

"Surely it seems as if something ought to be done,—I mean by people like ourselves,—with resources to mitigate if we cannot avert such things," Margaret went on, too completely wrapped in her theme to notice her uncle's expression.

"I know of no field more largely filled," Cuthbert Falcon returned in a tone of fatherly correction. "Our own Church, as you know—"

"Oh, I do not question that," Margaret put in hastily. "I was thinking more of our outside influence as men and women. We keep ourselves so separate, so far away from such people. We share a creed, but not our lives with them."

"They can hardly be said to have embraced a creed which they make an effort to live up to," her uncle returned in his level voice. "These people, I suppose, from the name, are Romanists, yet the magnificent discipline of that Church is not sufficient to hold them within the bounds

of the most ordinary morality. Nor do I see that the obliteration of social distinctions would be any influence for good in that direction. The French Revolution which wiped out such distinctions wiped out also eighteen centuries of Christian civilization including all reverence for God. The crying need of the hour is not more liberty nor more social equality, but a greater respect for authority and a more complete supremacy of law."

"I was not thinking of a socialism of force," Margaret said sadly, "and I dare say my wishes in the matter are rather vague and shadowy. I—"

"My dear girl, your wishes are never vague," Mrs. Faucon here broke in, as moving slowly toward her lawn chair they had come within hearing. "I tell Mobray you're the only woman in existence, not merely in Brockton, who's capable of managing him. Since your last appearance at the Hill Farm he's improved wonderfully. I'm glad to see there's nothing incompatible between your assisting him with his Italian and reminding him to brush his hair. If things go on in this way, we shall have him giving afternoon teas."

"Wouldn't that be jolly!" Hilda exclaimed with enthusiasm, getting up from her seat to greet Mildred, who just then made her appearance.

"I wish you'd arrange it," Miss Gilbreed returned placidly. "Brockton hasn't been any too brilliant this last week, though now Ashton's consented to honor us with his presence again, we may, perhaps, have some yachting."

"Provided the entertainment includes something for my poor little empty stomach, Mimsey meo, I give my hand and my heart to this vote," Hilda exclaimed, pulling the other girl down beside her on the garden bench and slipping an affectionate arm around her.

Leverson, who had been making the Rector comfortable by means of a wicker chair and a cigar, glanced up respon-

sively. Hilda always had the power of reducing his blue devils to a minimum, and she was usually willing to exert this benign influence without exacting anything in return, as Mildred would have done. Even in the presence of the Colonel (who could not so completely efface himself in Mrs. Faucon's substantial shadow as not to be more or less a reminder of disagreeable business details), Levenson began to feel quite himself again.

They sat there rather late in the waning light of the summer evening, the Rector's health not permitting him to officiate more than twice a day, which left St. Stephen's in charge of Mr. Griggs, the curate, for the evening service.

By the time they had gathered about the long mahogany table under the soft lamplight, and the Rector had given thanks for what he was going to receive, which, not being addressed to himself, struck Levenson as misplaced, the talk was very general, and one member of the company, at least, in high spirits.

In spite of the fact that etiquette required Mrs. Faucon's solid rampart of amiability on Levenson's right, Hilda's brilliant coloring and audacious speech on his left made a very pleasant contrast to Mildred's pink-and-white placidity farther down the table. That he had a more or less disagreeable interview with a delinquent clerk on the morrow had quite passed out of his memory under the influence of Miss Faucon's cheerful chatter.

"You're really mistaken about this not being the best season in town," she was remarking to Miss Laurie. "The thermometer only stood at par, and the supply of soda water was as unlimited as —"

"One of the Colonel's corporations," Levenson suggested.

"We don't water our stocks that way," the latter put in with complete good nature; "it's too expensive."

"I don't know what it does cost. Of course the men paid for it," Hilda returned dispassionately. "The place

was full of them, — men, I mean, poor lonely men, whose hearts were away at summer resorts, leaving them sweetly pensive and delightfully companionable. There's nothing," she went on, taking the entire table into her confidence, because they all seemed interested, "there's nothing I enjoy more than being somebody's (almost anybody's) second-best girl. The position's so safe, so satisfying."

"Like a second mortgage," the Colonel remarked; "one doesn't dare foreclose till the first one's out of the way."

"Oh, Hilda! How *can* you!" Mrs. Faucon put in reproachfully, though with evident enjoyment.

"But the first was out of the way," Mildred said softly, smiling across at the delinquent.

"Only geographically, Mimsey dear, and coming back at that. The Farleys were only in town themselves on their way through to the seashore, where I'm to join them in August, but Brockton was especially well represented: The Colonel was there to personify our politics, Reggie did very well for the fine arts, and I understand Mr. Leverson was there to speak for literature."

"Most unworthily," Leverson put in modestly, quite delighted at this view of his late trip, which had not occurred to him before. "But you don't tell us what you represented."

"Oh, I stood for Brockton's frivolity, of course," the girl retorted with a little laugh. "I should have ruined our reputation for serious thought if my baneful influence hadn't been offset by a fifth Brocktonite who more than made it up. You'll never guess who it was, so I may as well tell you. That Revivalist — the man with the fine eyes and terribly sad mouth. I saw him on the platform last night as we got on the train."

"Did he come alone?" Leverson asked with a sudden change from amusement to real interest; then conscious that this hunger for detail had caused the girl's eyes to

regard him curiously, he added quickly, "those people usually go about in squads, don't they, with bands and things?"

"No, no! That's the Salvation Army," Mildred put in correctly. "Though I suppose if you leave out the drum and the uniform, these people are very much like them."

"I'm afraid all such so-called religious movements are purely emotional," Mr. Faucon put in in his deliberate voice, though he smiled across at the last speaker. "Mr. Griggs tells me that this man, Meyer I believe the name is, is well meaning, but completely ignorant."

"I am very glad to be able to correct Mr. Griggs there," Margaret remarked from behind the tea urn. "Mr. Doniphan, who has taken a good deal of interest in him, has been making inquiries both of Meyer himself and some others. He turns out to be a graduate of Göttingen, and later a candidate for the Lutheran ministry, where they refused him ordination because he held to the doctrine that the ultimate source of appeal in religious matters must be the individual conscience."

"I had no idea the Lutherans were so level headed," Mr. Faucon remarked coldly, the word "correct" in Margaret's mouth not striking him as a proper one to be applied to the clergy, even such an inferior part of the clergy as the Rev. Mr. Griggs. "The fact that in view of some of Luther's own preaching they were slightly inconsistent need hardly be brought up against them, even if the story should turn out to be true. I am not at all surprised that the man came here—only surprised that he has not found a more comfortable birth than an unlicensed pastorate over a following in all probability even less amenable to authority than himself. In these days, especially in this country, such men are usually welcomed with open arms by sects which still enjoy calling themselves

orthodox, and they have even made some unscrupulous attempts to force themselves into the Church."

"If they would only go away and not talk so much," Mrs. Faucon put in plaintively, "one wouldn't mind; but what's the use of starting missions in the tenements, where such people would get good prayer-book doctrine and proper oversight, when nobody will come to them, and of course they won't come when these sensational preachers are doing their best to keep them away. And poor Moray, of course, has to go and encourage them for no reason in the world except that they're as odd as himself, poor man."

Mrs. Faucon's thus coming to the aid of her husband had its usual effect of making him drop the subject he had been so ably expounding, — a source of secret joy to Levenson, who was trying to catch Hilda's eye that he might reproach her for having got them into this and suggest her getting them out again.

She took the hint with marvellous quickness, — oddly enough more through filial affection than anything else, for no one knew better than she that the Reverend Cuthbert could be the best of company if but kept on safe topics. She not only did that, but kept the entire company so well employed that when at the end of this informal meal the telephone bell rang in Levenson's study, the Colonel was obliged to answer it through Levenson's default.

Margaret was playing with her teaspoon to fill in, while the Rector deliberately finished his third cup of tea, as no one else would make any pretence they had not finished theirs some time since. Hilda, feeling she had done enough, came to an abrupt pause, just as they heard the Colonel ejaculate, "Good heavens!" at the telephone in the next room.

This expression, being rather emotional for that passion-

less instrument, made the pause general. Even perfectly well-bred people have no hesitation in listening to a telephonic conversation not especially addressed to them. A man talking into a hole in the wall seems bereft of any individual right of privacy. Besides, you only hear half of it and have got to guess the rest, which makes it interesting, as if it were some kind of a round game.

The Colonel's next words did not lessen the interest.

"Not killed, I hope?"

(Long pause.)

"Yes. Yes, I know."

(Another pause.)

"What! Not Margaret!"

(Longest pause.)

"Well, well, some of us will come, of course, as soon as possible. Shameful thing! Had no business to be there — good-by."

Leverson pushed back his chair. The Rector set down his cup and turned, as every one else had already turned, to look at the Colonel who stood in the doorway, his eyes fixed on Ashton with a considering interest as if he were turning something over in his mind.

"Well, what is it?" Leverson demanded impatiently.

"It was Reggie — telephoned," the Colonel rejoined slowly, recovering his tongue; "and about that young man we were discussing this afternoon, — your clerk, Thallon."

Leverson, here glancing at Miss Laurie without clearly knowing why, followed that lady's eyes which were fixed, not on the Colonel, but on Margaret.

Mrs. Leverson had paled slightly at the mention of her brother's name, as she followed the Colonel with absorbed attention.

"He, Thallon, was attacked an hour or so ago in that vile hole they call Brockton Corners, — down near the

Junction, you know," the latter went on more briskly. "What he was doing in such a place at that hour is more than I can make out, for Reggie seems to know nothing of the details, — only reports that Mr. Doniphan found him there, and with the aid of some of the men got him on to the eight o'clock train. Reggie happened to be on it coming home, so he lent a hand getting him to the hospital. After they got him there, he recovered consciousness for a moment and asked to see Mrs. Leverson."

As the Colonel vouchsafed this piece of information, Leverson's eyes went back again to the lower end of the table, and this time they travelled in company with all the other eyes in the room, even the carefully veiled eyes of the astute Morgan. People in that exclusive circle waited on by Morgan and his kind are not supposed to express surprise at the unexpected, but at the moment there was the slightest possible shifting of shoulders, as well as a turning of heads, which in a less refined society would doubtless have been accompanied with other signs of curiosity.

Leverson himself, never having profited by Morgan's training, openly showed not only curiosity, but considerable amusement.

"Reggie's cracked," he observed to the Colonel, though he still kept his eyes on his wife. "The man may have asked for me (though I wish he hadn't), but as for his wanting Margaret, that's a little too cool, even for him. One would suppose we'd adopted him into the family. I say, you didn't adopt him while I was away, did you, Madge?"

Leverson put in this last touch of light and agreeable banter as if it had been a happy afterthought, glancing around at the assembled company as if inviting them to enjoy the joke. Nevertheless, he addressed the question directly to Margaret, — so directly as to make it marked if

she did not answer it. As a bid for appreciation the pleasantry was not a success. Nobody laughed. It struck Hilda Faucon as the most offensive thing she had ever heard Ashton Leverson say. She had only seen the more agreeable side of him until then.

Margaret sat there rigid and cold for an instant before she ventured to speak, but that was her only sign of embarrassment. When she found her words, they were to the point, though she ignored the pleasantry.

"As we are among the few people in Brockton Mr. Thallon can be said to know, it does not strike me as so very unnatural that he should have asked for us at a time like this," she said gravely. "Are you sure he included me?" she asked, turning to her father.

"Reggie was very positive as to that, for I made him repeat it," the Colonel rejoined easily, though he was conscious that he had unwittingly stumbled on one of the family jars. "But as to that," he went on with a desire to make things comfortable, "there's no earthly reason why you should go if you don't want to. The poor fellow was quite out of his head and might have asked for the Queen of Sheba."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of going!" Mrs. Faucon expostulated. "You never know what horrible diseases they have in such places. Mobray keeps me in a perfect twitter, he spends so much of his time there, and even Hilda insists on going because she belongs to the 'Shut In Society'; as if she couldn't do good in the world without exposing her family to small-pox."

"Really, Leverson," the Colonel broke in with some impatience, "leaving Margaret out of the question, I don't see how *you* can very well absent yourself under the circumstances; but if you like, I'll go with you. I reckon it's pretty serious. Reggie seems convinced the man's dying."

The word "dying," even as uttered in the Colonel's brisk, matter-of-fact voice, fell like a cold chill in the warm, close room. The inhabitants of a mill town are usually more or less acquainted with violence though not quite in such an unexpected form, — for usually it comes in the train of long-drawn-out industrial troubles, sufficiently heralded. Even the self-contained Rector rose to his feet somewhat hastily.

"This is horrible!" he ejaculated, looking at the Colonel as if he blamed him for the whole affair. "Is any one suspected? Can they imagine any motive for such an attack?"

"I doubt if they spent much time imagining anything," the Colonel replied easily, "though as a matter of fact the motive isn't far to seek. That Slathers gang are not very far back of this. There's been mutterings of renewed trouble lately, and Thallon, as Leverson's man, would be an easy mark, — which makes his going to such a place so much the less sensible." The Colonel felt himself, as a man of action, at a distinct advantage over the Rector in an emergency such as the present.

"I think we'd better be going," he added, turning to Leverson again. "Morgan can order the carriage; it will save time."

Perhaps there was something in the Colonel's smile which irritated the Rector, for he interrupted with a touch of assertion: "I remember this young man very well. I have seen him at St. Stephen's several times. I shall certainly go with you."

"Surely not in this night air, Cuthbert," Mrs. Faucon put in, almost tearful under the excitement.

As there was no other air to go home in, and as he had not been invited to stay all night at Elmhurst, the Rector did not think it necessary to answer this argument. Mrs. Faucon compromised by declaring that "if Cuthbert must

go and as Margaret was so upset," she and Hilda had better go home at once. Whereupon the Rectory carriage was also ordered, and there was a general movement toward the drawing-room.

Leverson had again glanced at his wife at that assertion of Mrs. Faucon's, — a very unjust assertion apparently, — for he had never seen her colder in manner, though her face beneath its crown of dusky hair still lacked color. As for him, he felt nothing more complex than that first sensation of annoyance which the Colonel's mention of Thallon's name just now had given him. This omnipresent clerk of his had managed already to spoil his morning and his afternoon, and now (still without taking the trouble to appear before his employer in the flesh) had got himself knocked on the head with the apparent purpose of spoiling the evening. But there was no help for it. The man was so mixed up in his own affairs he — Leverson — had got to take some notice of it; he saw that clearly enough in the corner of the Colonel's eye.

Margaret was busying herself in assisting Mrs. Faucon into her bonnet, a massive creation in black jet, that would have required delicate handling even if Mrs. Faucon could have been prevailed upon to keep her head still and had not talked incessantly. Margaret remembered afterward how much care she had spent in getting it straight, perhaps out of gratitude to her aunt for going home so promptly.

Mrs. Leverson had just completed this labor when she followed her husband into the hall where he had gone to find his hat. Both carriages would be there in a moment. The time was very short in which to ask that question which she had made up her mind to ask at any cost of humiliation to herself.

He did not notice that her lips were slightly compressed, her dark eyes unusually brilliant. He was not a man to

see little things like that, though if he had, he would have set it down to feminine hysteria. What did strike him was that she had suddenly dropped that stand-offishness of manner which had so enraged him since his return home, — a perception which gave him keen enjoyment, for it proved conclusively that he had gotten the better of her.

She went up to him speaking rather hurriedly and in a lowered voice, for the others might join them at any moment.

"I can't help feeling that I ought to go. Even if he had not asked to see me, I should feel that; for he is dying, and he has met his death through us, though not through any fault of ours. At such a time a woman might be of use; I could wait in the carriage if I were not needed, — if he were again unconscious, — if he did not ask for me. I have always been good at nursing and am perfectly cool. You do not object to my going, do you?"

Though her words were rapid they betrayed an undertone of hesitation quite unlike her, as if she were seeking reasons which would have weight with him; but at the end she broke into simple appeal as if she had already perceived the uselessness of any argument.

"Really, you're very kind," he observed, breaking into a short dry laugh which fitted badly with the subject they discussed, "very kind indeed, but I should say the family was sufficiently represented already. Reggie, as usual, has probably grossly exaggerated the thing, for which he will not get his uncle's ecclesiastical blessing when Faucon finds it out; but quite apart from that, the Brockton Hospital is well supplied with nurses, I believe. My advice to you is to go to bed and forget all about it. I wish to Heaven I could."

She stepped back from him as if he had struck her, her face deadly white, her hands clinched: —

"I *shall* go!" she said in a low, tense voice.

"I advise you not to — for your own sake," he retorted with a significant glance not devoid of malice. "Good night."

Margaret saw her visitors away without forgetting any of the proprieties. Hilda's parting with her was a shade more affectionate than usual, though Hilda was naturally demonstrative. There was only two years' difference between them, yet Margaret felt like an old woman as she returned the girl's kiss. It was perhaps fortunate that she did not realize she was being pitied. Margaret's pride was not yet quite dead, though she thought it was.

When she went back into the house, Mildred had already gone upstairs, and Miss Laurie was reading St. Peter's description of a burning world by the light of a lamp hot enough to have made it realistic. Without speaking, the girl passed on into Leverson's study, which was cold by contrast, and stood by the open window looking out wearily at the calm summer night.

Yet she took note neither of the black, purple, star-strewn sky which showed above the massed trees beyond the lawn, nor of the dim lustre of the stars themselves that made its depths vibrate with ceaseless life; saw nothing beyond the vision of another life as she had known it but a day or two before in its perfect strength. It had been so full then to overflowing with plans and hopes for the future. And she who had no future of her own was still living — and he lay dying among strangers.

CHAPTER XX

A FALSE STEP

THREE gentlemen descending the hospital staircase paused for an instant at the door, while Gillis the janitor was calling the carriages. All three looked fagged; Faucon worried, Gilbreed thoughtful, Leverson distinctly sleepy.

"I'm by no means certain," the Rector was saying to his brother-in-law, "that I should not remain. He may recover consciousness at any time and ask for spiritual advice."

"He'll ask for nothing before morning, you can depend on that," the Colonel returned with conviction. "You'd better go home to Abby, who's probably worried to death about you. They can telephone you at any time if they want you, which isn't likely. You've certainly done your best to keep in with your constituents,—I mean you've done your duty by the Church. In short, we've all shown a very proper interest in coming here, though I wish," he added in a lower tone, glancing regretfully at his son-in-law,— "though I wish Ashton hadn't gone to sleep."

The gentleman referred to, who was engaged at the moment in lighting a cigar to get the smell of carbolic out of his nose, straightened himself to return the criticism.

"Look here," he demanded, ignoring the Colonel's reproach, "what put it into your head to send for White-law? What has he got to do with Thallon?"

"I sent for him largely because he seems to know more of the boy's antecedents than any one else. For instance,

I didn't know until to-night that he came originally from the West, though Whitelaw seems to know all about it. He's telegraphed to find out if there are any relatives; has taken charge of some mail matter just arrived from the Everett, and has made himself generally useful. But then you never did appreciate Whitelaw. Well, here come the carriages. Good night, Faucon; trust you won't be any the worse for your night drive. Take some Scotch whiskey when you get home, to keep out the damp; this river fog's as full of malaria as a melon is of seeds."

Gillis had slammed the door of the Rectory coach, and stood respectfully holding open that of the Elmhurst brougham as the former vehicle drove off rapidly.

"Hit's a bad case, sir," he remarked with easy confidence to the Colonel. "Hi saw the second doctor goin' in 'alf an 'our since."

The Colonel was always friendly with Gillis, who was a useful man.

"They'll give no positive opinion to-night," he returned kindly. "At the best it's concussion of the brain, and that I understand's serious. And all, Gillis, the result of keeping bad company, though the man himself is doubtless respectable. Those labor agitators are a bad lot, Gillis,—a very dangerous lot indeed. You must keep your district in good working order if only for the sake of putting them down in November in the cause of law and order. Mind that, Gillis!"

Intense stillness settled again on the street outside the hospital when the sound of the Elmhurst wheels had died in the distance and the defender of law and order had returned to his former position at the side door of the hospital.

Upstairs, in the large, square office of the Superintendent, the silence was as unbroken as in the street below. In an adjoining and smaller room Dr. Lindley and Cassett, the

Harrisburg surgeon (who had been caught by good fortune on his way through Brockton), were bending over a small iron bed which was just visible through the open door.

Doniphan, whose will was law at the Brockton General, had impressed the Superintendent's only rocking-chair, and planted himself where he could get the best view of what was going on inside. Thallon's dog lay fast asleep on his knees — very dusty knees, by the way, as was the rest of his somewhat dishevelled person, suggesting his having been caught napping on the Harrisburg Road and "run in" on a charge of vagrancy. His sister Abby would not have been proud of him could she have seen him then.

Reggie Gilbreed, nursing a long leg in a straight-backed chair in one corner, watched Doniphan curiously. He had always thought of him as a rather musty book-worm, and his late development into a trained nurse rather puzzled the boy. Reggie himself was not strong on death-bed scenes, and nothing short of the fact that Thallon was the last man under whose influence he had found himself could possibly have accounted for his lingering in a hospital atmosphere after he had ceased to make himself useful in bringing the patient in.

Having carried to a successful issue an idea originating with this new-found friend, he had come back to Brockton full of a childlike desire for praise and appreciation, and all he had found was this. Discussion of this one topic with any one save Thallon struck him as impossible, and enforced silence was always trying to Reggie. He showed it then plainly.

Whitelaw sat writing at a small table upon which lay scattered several open telegrams and a pile of other correspondence. He was, as the Colonel had said, making himself extremely useful.

Doniphan was the only one of the three who believed that the injured man would get well. He had even suc-

ceeded a little while back in getting a good deal of quiet amusement out of the situation, especially out of Leverson, who was so evidently there under orders from the Colonel. It was always a keen pleasure to Doniphan to see Leverson under anybody's orders, and it was not a pleasure he enjoyed every day.

Presently Whitelaw deliberately gathered his papers together, folded them neatly, and, placing them in his coat pocket, rose to go. Almost at the same moment the two physicians entered the room.

"We can do nothing more to-night," Lindley said in a low tone as Doniphan rose, with a pair of eyes which had suddenly become questioning glancing rapidly from one physician to the other. "All we can say positively is that he will not die directly from shock. Pulse and temperature are both increasing which, of course, means fever. With his constitution, he will fight that for a week at least, — I hope successfully. There is no reason any of us should stay. Cassett has got to leave on the midnight train, and won't return unless he's sent for. He assures me there's no fracture of the skull. The broken arm saved his head that much. His call was close enough as it was. He may recover consciousness in the night, but he'll do no more than babble nonsense. The house doctor will be on duty in half an hour, and if there's any change for the worse, I can be sent for. You'd better go home yourself, Doniphan; you look dead used up."

"Never felt better in my life. Never had the least belief that the boy was going to knock under. Shan't let him slip through my fingers just when I was about to start him on the right road! Not much! As for me, — you know at times I half live at the hospital. I shall stay here an hour or two yet. I've telephoned home for the carryall, so I'm all right."

Whitelaw and Reggie had joined the group by the hall

door where they stood talking. The effect of the little man's sanguine words on each was curiously different. Whitelaw, whose white teeth had been showing in one of his pleasant smiles, became suddenly grave; young Gilbreed gave a long sigh of relief and his eyes kindled. The surgeon's hand was on the door-knob. He was evidently in a hurry. Lindley had laid one affectionate forefinger on Doniphan's arm, but he only said: —

"I thought perhaps you'd stay; but whatever else you do, you can't go on without your meals. I'll have Stephenson send something up to you here. I insist on that."

"Don't mind if you do; I'm ravenous," Doniphan laughed, as they went out into the hall, the dog close at his heels. When he came back again a moment later he was still chuckling over something as he stowed away an old-fashioned leather pocket-book in his trousers pocket.

"I'm glad you take such a cheerful view of it," Whitelaw remarked, his eyes fixed intently on the little man's face. "Have you got any theory yet as to the cause of this unfortunate affair?"

"Yes, I have," Doniphan said, returning the look.

"I suppose you agree with the Colonel, — Thallon was struck at because he was Leverson's clerk?"

"No — that is, my theory's a trifle more complete than that, and, if I may hazard a guess, yours is too."

Whitelaw was smiling again now, this time with genuine appreciation of the other's powers of penetration.

"You're but mad north-northwest," he said, laughing outright. "When the wind's southerly —"

"Yes, I know. I'll see you about that part of the thing to-morrow. You've got no definite news from the West, — Iowa, isn't it?"

"No one of that name there now, and apparently no connections of any kind; but the name's known."

"Thought as much! Noticed that letter you had on

the table there just now addressed to Thallon carried an Iowa postmark and a letter-head I've forgotten. As I shall be with him more or less until he pulls through, I might take charge of it."

"I can hardly give you that trouble. You see I was commissioned by Colonel Gilbreed to take charge of any mail matter."

"Really, I can hardly see what the Colonel's got to do with it."

"Only, I believe, that he represents Mr. Leverson's wishes, and Leverson, at least nominally, still employs Thallon. Under the circumstances, I suppose the Colonel might ask what you have got to do with it."

"Oh, if that's necessary, I certainly don't represent Leverson's wishes," Doniphan laughed, "though for that matter I doubt if Gilbreed does either. However, if you regard it as a sacred trust, I've nothing to say. Good night, Reggie. Cheer up, boy! You're not likely to be called on for chief mourner for some time yet, so there's no use wasting tears studying the part."

Reggie was not at all responsive to this facetiousness. It struck him as ill-timed and in very bad taste.

"I can't understand why Madge didn't come," he observed moodily. "She couldn't have done any good, but after all *he* asked for her."

"Quite as well as it is," Doniphan returned. "From what he said I gathered Leverson had shut down on it. I'm only sorry you told them anything about it; she'll worry over it for a month. However, you won't, so good night to you."

Though on Reggie's last view of it Doniphan's face was grinning amiably at them from over the balusters, the little man presently closed the door of the Superintendent's office with a sign of intense relief, as though he were shutting out some persistent problem as yet but half solved.

He walked thoughtfully over to the door of the inner room and looked in.

A white-capped nurse was bending over the small iron bed adjusting some bandages. The room was intensely still. He stood there watching her moodily, his late cheerfulness for the moment all gone.

He cheered up immensely, however, when a second white-capped nurse brought in a well-filled tray, upon the contents of which he immediately fell to with a relish, though his appetite did not prevent his sharing half his meal with Thallon's new-found canine friend, who, small as he was, ate as if his stomach were the bottomless pit.

"I reckon I'll call you 'Twist,' because you're always asking for more, you glutton," he soliloquized, as he finished his last piece of toast. "It might have been Diogenes, because you undoubtedly were in search of an honest man; but you don't deserve it, for you brought him beastly bad luck when you did find him, you ungrateful beggar. No, you needn't plead that his honesty hasn't been proved. Neither has mine, for that matter. That sort of thing takes time, and meanwhile I propose to believe in him, Twist — I propose to believe in him."

He pushed the tray farther on to the small table where he had been sitting, got up from his chair, and stole into the next room again. The deathly blue pallor had left the face since he had last seen it, and it was now flushed with increasing fever. Doniphan glanced at the nurse to see if she had noted the change. She was already adding cracked ice to the bandages.

"Lindley told me they expected this," he remarked.

The nurse nodded. "But not quite so soon," she volunteered.

The house doctor came in presently, — a young protégé of Lindley's. Doniphan watched his face as he felt the patient's pulse and glanced at the temperature record.

"How's the fight going?"

Doniphan had not meant to ask that question again, but he couldn't help it.

"Only just beginning. He's in now for a week of fever. We ought to be able to pull him through that, Mr. Doniphan."

The house doctor went away, promising to be back in half an hour, and Doniphan bent over the bed again. The injured arm lay in splints on the outside of the covers, the fingers of the other hand were moving restlessly, as were the lips, drawn as they were by pain. Doniphan laid his hand on the boy's cheek with a touch which might have been a woman's. Without question Doniphan was an odd stick.

His back was toward the door, yet so intense was the stillness that he could hear the ticking of the Waterbury clock on the table in the other room, — the table under which Twist had gone to sleep again so as to be as near the tea-tray as possible.

Doniphan did not turn when a moment later he heard some one enter the room softly. The nurses were always coming in or going out, and his mind was occupied just then with the results of their work, not its details.

But this figure which had slipped noiselessly round to the other side of the bed was draped in a long black cloak instead of the usual spotless white. The color penetrated his consciousness, as perhaps nothing else would have done at the moment. It seemed to have something ill-omened and sinister about it. He looked up with a start and faced the last person he would have expected to find there, — Margaret Leverson.

She, on her part, seemed completely unconscious of his presence or that of anything else except the rigid figure on the bed. Her eyes were fixed on that with a questioning intensity, the more marked that the rest of her face, though cold and white, was perfectly calm.

Doniphan's quick wits were at his disposal again even before any ejaculation of surprise could escape his lips, for they were very well-disciplined lips though disfigured by a bad quirk in one corner. As he glanced at her from under his bushy eyebrows, he surmised a potentiality in the girl's character he had not suspected before, though he had watched her grow to womanhood. Not that his faith in her was shaken, even then. Had Margaret Leverson been consciously moved by anything save a woman's pity for the man she believed lay before her dying, she was the last woman in the world to have come there as she had. In a flash it went through him what the girl's life had exposed her to, what her ignorance of its danger was exposing her to now. Something had got to be done, and quickly. The nurse had paused in her work and was regarding Margaret curiously.

"My dear girl, this is very kind and like you," he said, crossing to where she stood and laying a kindly hand upon her arm. "I sent back word by Leverson that if you could get here to-night, you might be of help to me. The boy's been trying to say something which none of us men could make out. You'll do better, I take it, especially now he's coming round so well."

The utter absurdity of his having sent any such message to her through Ashton Leverson did not trouble Doniphan in the least. It would not be apparent to an outsider, and so the excuse served his purpose. Doniphan's lies were like Uncle Toby's oaths, liable to give the recording angel more blotting out to do.

Margaret had taken her eyes from Thallon's face and fixed them upon Doniphan's without changing their expression. They seemed to carry a reflection of the terrible contrast which was haunting her,—the contrast between the ghastly vacant face upon the pillow and the face of Owen Thallon as she had seen it last. Yet save her eyes, she still held herself in complete control.

"You mean that he will live?" she asked in a perfectly level voice which had in it a touch of incredulity. "The message received at Elmhurst was that he was dying."

"We couldn't tell how it was going at first, but there's a good fighting chance now, and I, for one, have made up my mind he's going to live. There, he's coming to!" Doniphan added almost triumphantly, looking down at the face again.

Margaret's lighted wonderfully at his words. By a quick, impulsive movement she turned from Doniphan and sank on her knees by the side of the bed.

And so it was that Thallon's eyes, opening to returning consciousness, saw only the face of Margaret Levenson, — a face brilliant with suppressed feeling, the lips smiling bravely as she saw he recognized her.

"You must live," she said softly, as if she were speaking to a child. "You must live, because you have work to do."

Still smiling, she looked back at Doniphan. She had tried to encompass in a sentence something of the great obligation that lay so heavy on her soul. Doniphan nodded, though he was very doubtful if the sick man had understood her. He had only made a faint attempt at a smile in token of recognition before his eyes closed again.

"Well, well, we must give it up for to-night," Doniphan said regretfully, though he was only anxious to get her away. A few moments later he made an excuse to draw her into the next room and closed the connecting door behind him. As soon as they were alone she asked abruptly: —

"Is it true that he was attacked because he represented, or was supposed to represent, Mr. Levenson?"

"My theory is," Doniphan returned slowly, "though I don't care to share it with any one but you at present —

my theory is that Owen Thallon was attacked because he was *mistaken* for Mr. Leverson."

She looked at him in speechless astonishment.

"Yes, I know they're not in the least alike," he went on, smiling, "except as to height and general build, and one or two peculiarities of gait. Of course Leverson is much stouter, but that would not be noticed in the gloom of a wood road late in the evening. Then, he was with me — and I had gone down to Slathers's shanty to see about these rumored labor troubles. I've done the same thing with Leverson under the same circumstances before; when we wanted to see those people on the quiet, you understand. You see the connection's close enough."

"But who could possibly wish to murder Mr. Leverson?"

Doniphan could think of several persons who would not have wept at the news of Leverson's violent demise, but none likely to undertake the job, so he answered truthfully: —

"I don't know."

She looked at him doubtfully, as if she suspected him of suppressing something.

"How did you get here?" he asked rather abruptly, breaking a pause during which he had placed a chair for her, though she did not take it.

"On the electric. I brought Alice with me. I left her downstairs in the waiting-room."

She submitted to his questions, her eyes scanning his face for approval or disapproval as if she had been a naughty child. Doniphan looked at his watch with a frown.

"Humph! close on eleven. No hour for you to go back in that way," he grunted. "The carryall's at the Everett and I shall take you home. Did Ashton sanction your coming?"

She flared up at the words in sudden defiance.

"No; he forbade it!"

He saw then what he had only suspected before, — that this thing was serious. Doniphan was not a man to shirk responsibility, though he was already staggering under a load which would have satisfied most people.

He made her tell him all there was to tell, which she did unwillingly, though with no attempt to shield Leverson, her paramount thought in a similar interview with Dr. Lindley less than three months before.

He heard her through to the end without comment; then said slowly:—

"And after all's said, Leverson was quite right. You must remember he is not acquainted with my theory, which, after all, is only a theory, and to him Owen Thallon has simply met with a piece of ill fortune such as might happen to any one. He was not even engaged on Leverson's business when he was attacked. Considering the circumstances, Ashton himself has certainly behaved very well, and his objections to your coming here were obvious. Beyond his business connection, what can he know of Owen Thallon?"

"Beyond his own interests, he neither knows nor cares," the girl returned hotly; "but that is neither here nor there. I have not asked him to be anything but himself, but he has no right to try to make me like him. He has not bought my soul!"

It was on Doniphan's lips to add, "But he has bought the power to ruin your life," but he checked himself, seeing clearly that she was in no state for further argument. Instead he veered abruptly into a different strain, soothing her in words marvellously soft for him, and presently getting her to talk of other things.

"I'll send Gillis for the carryall at once, for we can do nothing further here," he said when she had quieted down.

"You keep an eye on Twist (Thallon's dog, you know), who goes with us. I won't be half a minute."

Twist woke up grudgingly, but was willing to make friends when Margaret produced some scraps of toast remaining on the tray.

On the drive home Doniphan regaled Margaret with the dog's romantic history, thankful that Alice's presence on the front seat prevented the discussion of anything more serious. All through the tedious night drive, he kept saying to himself that the girl had got to have time to pull herself together before he or any one could help her, if helped she could be even then.

And yet when they reached the house, which appeared closed for the night, and Alice had gone around to the servant's quarters to arouse the watchful Morgan, leaving them waiting in the carriage, she herself came back to it again as if she could not let him go without one more word. With one of her impulsive movements she leaned forward in her seat and took one of his hands in both of hers.

"I know you blame me, but you do not despise me, do you?" she asked, her voice a little unsteady.

"I can't love and despise at the same time," he said, his tone saying much more than words. She could not see his face in the darkness.

"Ah!" she said with a sharp indrawing of the breath, as her fingers closed more tightly on his, "neither can I!"

"I have not asked the impossible," he returned, choosing his words carefully, for he knew now she wanted him to speak, and what he said might mean life or death to her, "but I do ask this of you. Do not worry too much about working out the good that is in you. It will have its chance all in good time. Do not be afraid that the petty meannesses of every day have any power to drag

you down except through your own weakness, through your participation in them. Don't be afraid you will ever be damned for other people's sins, and while giving no sanction to the sin itself, always give the sinner the benefit of the doubt."

"But we do sanction if we tamely acquiesce," she returned, withdrawing her hands, all defiance again.

"Not at all," Doniphan rejoined almost cheerfully, he was so pleased at her anger. "We simply take a negative part under protest, because by doing so we fulfil the duty which lies nearest to hand; a much less agreeable duty than that other active one outside. Faucon and the religionists would tell you that God had given you this inside, irksome task (cross, I suppose they'd call it), and therefore you must bear it without question as to its purpose. I can't honestly go as far as that, not being at all intimate with the purposes of the Almighty. To me you simply accepted a certain trust, and have pledged your solemn word to fulfil that trust, for better for worse, before all else. Whether you accepted it with your eyes open or closed does not matter. To be true to yourself you must first be true to that. I know it's hard, — perhaps it's even harder than I know, — but this is certain, *it's right!*"

He could say no more, for the Elmhurst front door was being opened by the discreet and noiseless Morgan, though as yet he held it but a few inches ajar as if he were about to admit a doubtful candidate into heaven.

The hand which again touched Doniphan's, as he helped her out of the carryall, was hot to feverishness, but it was firm. "I'll try — again," she said.

Doniphan winced; there was a revelation of past struggle and failure in that last word "again" more pathetic than tears.

"And succeed," he answered, patting her elbow because

he could not conveniently reach her shoulder. "You remember that line of Epictetus :—

"For not only did He make thee, but to thee alone did He commit thyself."

They were his last hopeful words that night, for in a moment she had left him and he was alone in the dark stillness of the night; alone with his own thoughts and Twist.

The dog lay curled up in his lap fast asleep throughout the long drive home, doubtless dreaming that he had reached some canine paradise. It was so easy to help *him*. *His* wants were few and simple.

CHAPTER XXI

REGGIE MAKES A CLEAN BREAST OF IT

IF Mobray Doniphan got three hours' sleep that night, he did remarkably well. He unquestionably breakfasted early, for by seven o'clock he was keeping his telephone wire hot with a series of messages to the chief of the Brockton police, which must have elicited some sort of satisfactory reply, for he finally left that much-abused instrument grinning terribly.

He had hung up the receiver and was walking with his usual brisk step through the wide hall of his old house, intent on ordering the carryall, when through the open front door he caught sight of a horseman coming up the avenue at a sharp canter. Equestrian visitors were not so numerous at the Hill Farm as not to attract attention, and Doniphan at once adjourned to the front piazza to investigate this one.

"Why, it's Reggie by all that's wonderful!" the little man exclaimed, as the boy swung himself off his horse at the foot of the piazza steps. "Where did you come from at this time of day? Have you got the worm already, or did you reckon on finding it here?"

For some odd reason this pleasantry seemed to embarrass Reggie who, having silently returned Doniphan's salutation, was busy hitching his horse to the piazza rail in lieu of anything better.

"I came to see you about this man Dupré," he returned, after he had followed Doniphan into the great cool room

on the left of the hall, and had seated himself on the chair his host indicated with a little nod. The room appeared to serve the purpose of library and study, its low walls being lined with open bookshelves save where they were broken by a huge old-fashioned fireplace and the necessary doors and windows.

Doniphan remained standing before the empty fireplace in a position which gave him a good view of Reggie's face across the litter of his work-table, which was a miracle of orderly confusion.

"It's very good of you to be willing to lend a hand," he said heartily, "but I think that part of our work is pretty well done. I got a message from Cheeseman a few minutes ago saying they'd tracked the man as far as Lancaster. If he's there, and he's hardly had time to get much farther, he'll be taken within an hour, may be taken by this time, as far as that goes. So I don't see that you can help us in any way."

"You don't understand at all," Reggie returned with increasing embarrassment which showed in his picking up a volume from the table and absently thumbing its leaves. "I haven't come here with any intention of helping you run Dupré down; on the contrary, I came here expressly to ask you to let up on him."

Doniphan walked over to where his visitor was sitting and took the volume away from him without showing any surprise at this sudden change of programme.

"I can't let you play with it," he explained pleasantly; "you've dropped out three of the marks already, which will give Madge an extra half hour's work this afternoon. Why do you want me to let up on Dupré?"

"I'm sorry about the marks," the boy said, flushing. "As for Dupré, I think I can make that clear to you. But first I want to ask you how you managed to connect him with this outrage. It seems absurd on the face of it.

Why in the name of common sense should Dupré want to murder Thallon?"

"Well, to begin with your first, as the enigmas put it," Doniphan replied, smiling his grim little smile, "we have the testimony of a very bad and a very good witness. That boy called the Whelp, when put under considerable pressure, disgorged the name of Dupré as the man who struck the blow. This taken alone may not be conclusive, but we also have the evidence of the Harrisburg Road. Within ten rods of the spot where Thallon fell is a low place in the road beside some stunted alders. It always holds enough water from the last rain to be muddy, — half-dried clay mud which takes a good impression of a boot and keeps it. It held three such prints last night, easy to see even by lantern light. Two were made by Thallon's own shoes, and one by a much heavier, clumsier boot, such as might have been worn by a laborer. All were very freshly made, for they covered and partly obliterated the marks of wheels made earlier. Cheeseman, of course, lost no time in going down to Dupré's shanty in the swamp, where he found neither Dupré nor his daughter, but what he much preferred to either, — a pair of Dupré's boots, daubed with considerable red-clay mud not yet dry, and fitting perfectly into the print on the Harrisburg Road. Now that answers your first question."

Reggie had leaned forward in his chair and was following Doniphan with an eagerness curiously unlike him.

"And my second?" he asked, as Doniphan paused.

"Ah, that's different," the little man returned with a provoking change of manner which suggested the shutting up of an oyster suddenly conscious of having been too communicative. "I have a theory, of course, but I'm not disposed to air it until I can judge whether it will hold water."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind my guessing what it is,"

Reggie hazarded; "you needn't say whether I'm right or wrong."

"I've got to leave the house in fifteen minutes," Doniphan returned, consulting his watch, "but you can fill it in in that way if you like."

"It won't take fifteen seconds," Reggie said with some touch of his old easy confidence. "You don't think Dupré intended that blow for Thallon at all, but for Leverson."

Doniphan shot a glance at the boy from under his heavy eyebrows which was appreciative whatever else it was. It passed instantly, but left a twinkle in the sharp black eyes and the quirk in the corner of the mouth very noticeable.

"Young man," he said impressively, "I believe you've got a good deal of what the Yankees would call 'cuteness' about you. I suppose you got it from the Colonel; your poor mother was far too much of a saint not to be easily imposed upon. You and I are not troubled that way, it seems."

"I shan't ask you how near I came to making a bull's eye," Reggie laughed, and flushed again, this time from pleasure at his success. "I promised not to, and besides it's not necessary. You see, after all, I should only substitute one name for another. Why should Dupré want to murder Leverson any more than Thallon?"

Doniphan was never mysterious unless he had something to gain by it. If the boy knew as much about this thing as he did, he was quite prepared to admit it. By doing so it was just possible he might learn something himself.

"Between drink and that inflammable French blood a hundred trifles might have sufficed," he observed thoughtfully. "Leverson was his employer. If the man's wages had been docked within a month, the incident might have been tortured into a fancied wrong. The newspapers are full of such aimless murders every day."

This bald admission that his investigations had carried him no farther, that he was here groping in a darkness of theory as absolute as any which could possibly encompass his listener, only confirmed Reggie in fulfilling both of the objects which had brought him to the Hill Farm at that early hour. When Reggie had once made up his mind that it was his duty to tell all he knew on any given subject, he inevitably did so with neatness and despatch. His fifteen minutes were not over before he had placed Mobray Doniphan in possession of all the facts connected with that odd meeting at the studio of such incongruous personalities as Thallon, Dupré, and Meyer the Revivalist, with the disappearance of Louise Dupré and his own and Meyer's journey to the city, together with his reasons for suspecting Leverson, whose shadowy and uncertain connection with the story appeared to impress Doniphan beyond its narrator's most sanguine expectations.

"If this be true," he said at length, more to himself than his companion, before whom he had again planted himself after several minutes' restless pacing about the room, "if this be true, Madge Leverson is free. No law of God or man could ask her to cling to him through this."

Reggie looked at him curiously a moment.

"I was only thinking of her happiness," he said simply. "I couldn't imagine Margaret Gilbreed happy as a divorced woman."

"She is certainly not happy now," Doniphan growled, conscious as he turned away again that wisdom may at times come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings; "but on other grounds, you're right. It's not her happiness that's at stake; it's her safety."

Reggie looked puzzled, but had to content himself with answering, not asking, questions, which Doniphan now showered upon him in rapid succession, making him repeat substantially all he had said about Leverson.

"I have no proof positive that he was really the cause of the girl's disappearance," Reggie finished breathlessly. "Meyer unearthed her in a West Philadelphia tenement where he knew she had acquaintances. All we could get out of them was that she had been visited there by a gentleman whose description, as we got it, might have fitted any one. When we first reached there, the girl was out, presumably with him, though when after an hour of waiting for her she returned, she came alone, and looking more like a thunder-cloud than ever. From that moment Meyer never left her until, before night, he had persuaded her to cut away from the whole thing, though getting her back to Brockton was simply out of the question, for she met that with a flat refusal. What he did succeed in doing was the next best thing, — placed her with some people he knew, workers in some sort of brotherhood they've started, with the promise that they'd get her work to do. He came back Saturday to tell Dupré that she was safe and well, though he was to say nothing of the mysterious gentleman. Yet it must have reached the man's ears in some way, and he's drawn his own conclusions either against Leverson or against Thallon. If he left Brockton directly after the attack, it was probably to see the girl."

"Whom he will also try to murder if he reaches her before we get our claws on him," Doniphan remarked. "Considering all the circumstances, it strikes me as odd you should want us to drop the scent."

"Why, I thought that was the first thing that would strike you," Reggie cried in amazement. "If the man is caught, and if this thing is brought home to him, he'll tell all he knows. He is liable to have proof of Leverson's guilt which we have not got at all. If he fastens the thing on Leverson, Madge will leave Elmhurst inside fifteen minutes, and I shall be under obligations to shoot Leverson on sight."

Doniphan began to look wicked.

"Your spirit does you infinite credit," he returned slowly, and with that very slight nasal inflection which always came to him when he tapped his huge resources of scathing sarcasm — "infinite credit," he repeated, his eyes on the unfortunate Reggie; "but all the same it seems to me your ethics are just a trifle shaky. If you don't mind my saying so, you not only seem to me very much out in your suggestion of a remedy for this state of things, but to have taken the wrong moment for turning on your righteous indignation. That a man like Leverson has worked this misery is something you appear able to ignore, provided the disgusting fact is not made public. When he is no longer able to keep it quiet, your propose to punish him, not for his crime, but for his lack of criminal acuteness, by blowing out what little brains he's got. And all this I suppose for the sake of making your sister comfortable and happy."

"Would you prefer that I shot him now?" Reggie demanded, roused to some sort of self-defence by the other's rough handling.

"You silly little boy, I have no intention of allowing you to shoot him either now or at any other time," Doniphan retorted, his eyes blazing. "Neither, if it's any satisfaction to you to know it, do I intend that Leverson's unmentionable sins shall furnish food for the newspapers. We have nothing whatever to do with his punishment, and if we had, we could not strike him without striking her. Madge shall have all the protection I can give her, but she is not the only person in the world, and if it is to be a question of her peace of mind or the other girl's death, her peace of mind will have to go. If Thallon dies, Dupré will have to be hung; if Thallon lives, Dupré must be put where he can do no more harm. In either case he will not implicate Leverson; but if he did, we can only stand by Madge, and

you won't add to the general unpleasantness by shooting her husband either."

"And where, if all this turns out as you admit it may, do you propose she should go?" Reggie demanded hotly. "You know well enough that my father —"

"Yes, I know all about him — a great deal more than you do," Doniphan went on savagely. "He would side with Levenson as long as their financial interests were as much in common as they have been lately, but that's very far from saying she'll have no refuge. While I've got a roof over my head, it's as much hers as mine, but she must fight out her battle first, and fight it out well for her own sake. Your idea, however, that I've planned any such doleful ending is all bosh. Dupré's capture will by no means bring this Levenson matter to a head. If Ashton is kept in ignorance of the girl's whereabouts, Dupré is locked up, and Thallon can be brought round, things may turn out better than you think. If Dupré still meditates revenge, he will certainly make no confession of his real purpose. Before he is out of prison, Levenson will be miles away. Thallon was quite right when he told you that Levenson's suffering at Dupré's hands must be guarded against before everything. Our letting him go now would hardly tend that way."

"I can't agree with you about Levenson's silence," Reggie said moodily; "he's just the kind of man to brag about this thing."

"If he were to succeed in it, yes; but thanks to Thallon and Meyer, and in a certain degree to you, he hasn't as yet made a very shining success of it. We'll take good care he doesn't. I'm very glad you've told me what you have. It's the first time I've had a clear view of this thing, though I'd guessed at parts of it. Thallon's part was well taken, though of course you'll have sense enough to keep that fact from Madge. There are things about that boy I like,"

he went on after a pause. "A good many young fellows of five and twenty would have attempted the part he assigned to you. Of course I know he's very poor — lack of means may have had something to do with it; he was, of course, tied here by his engagement to Leverson, and yet I don't believe it was altogether that which made him keep so quietly in the background and yet do something. It's not everybody guards disagreeable family matters they've happened to stumble on quite as carefully. You Gilbreeds owe him something."

Reggie, painfully conscious that one Gilbreed owed him a cool hundred, rose and walked restlessly over to the large square window, which commanded a magnificent view of the wide valley below, with the river, here reduced to a mere streak of silver, gleaming in the brilliant sunshine. He had come to the Hill Farm that morning under the impression that he had done several things worthy of high praise. Somehow that impression seemed to be rapidly oozing out of him. He let the rest of it go without further effort, turning abruptly and again facing Doniphan.

"In justice to Thallon I ought to tell you that he loaned me the money to go. I believe it was all the money he had, practically his last cent. I couldn't help but take it. Of course I had to pay Meyer's expenses, and I was as usual dead — Good heavens! what have I said?"

Doniphan had taken a step toward him, his long arm half raised, his thin fingers working nervously; but it was rather the peculiar expression stamped on the hard, straight mouth which had interrupted Reggie's labored confession.

"You Gilbreeds are entirely beyond me," the elder man put in sharply. "Considering I've been told so much, perhaps I might be allowed to get to the bottom of all this. May I ask the amount loaned you by Thallon?"

Reggie was again admiring the view. "One hundred," he answered over his shoulder, while he punctuated the admission by gently tapping the top of his riding-boot with his crop. The riding-boots were not inexpensive and the crop was a beauty.

"I think I could say better what I've got to say if you were to turn round," Doniphan remarked in parenthesis. "I dislike saying disagreeable things of people behind their backs."

Thus encouraged Reggie faced him again.

"While we are on the subject, you might tell me how much else you owe, and whom you owe it to," Doniphan went on in the same tone.

"I came here intending to make a clean breast of it," Reggie faltered, though he was doing his best to keep cool. "I owe Leverson twenty-five hundred, and he's got my note for it. That's the sum total of the whole thing, honor bright, except this trifle from Thallon, and one or two, at the most four or five, little accounts in Brockton. This Leverson accommodation represents practically everything for the last two or three years. He insisted on making the loan just after I got back from Europe. I was pressed to death for money; the governor had washed his hands of me, and this beastly Dupré mess hadn't so much as put its nose in sight."

"Did you ever know Leverson give away anything? Did you ever hear of his advancing money to any human being without exacting its due return with usury? *Now*, did you?" Doniphan demanded impatiently.

"I never said it was a gift," Reggie retorted. "On the contrary, I've just said it was a loan, a regular note carrying six per cent."

Doniphan gave a snort and that peculiar action of the shoulders which with him expressed more contempt than any mere words could have done.

"It carried a good deal more than six per cent, and you know it now if you didn't know it then," he said savagely. "It carried the price of your neutrality in this Dupré affair. Bah! you might have known he never gave anything away."

"He gives Faucon a good deal for the Church," Reggie said, in a tone that implied he might have made a catalogue of Leverson's benefactions if Doniphan had only given him time.

"Not at all. Every cent of that's put away for a rainy day. Without having any religion Leverson has what usually fills that vacuum, — considerable latent superstition. It has struck him that in case, on the day of judgment, Revealed Religion should turn out to amount to something after all, such an investment in its securities would come in handy. It's simply a sight draft on Heaven. Can't you think of anything else?"

Reggie making no attempt to think of anything else, his disagreeable entertainer continued in the same strain, for Doniphan was now in one of his worst tempers and had forgotten all about the time.

"You may as well finish the whole thing up," he went on after another turn or two about the room. "You say you came up here to make a clean breast of it. After having done so as thoroughly as you have, what did you expect me to do? When people get themselves into a mess like this, they always expect me to do something; I suppose you're no exception to the rule."

"I thought — perhaps — you could advise me."

"And you expected nothing but advice?"

"No! I can't lie about it," Reggie put in with sudden courage. "I thought, considering these unforeseen circumstances, — the horrible position I'm in toward Leverson, — I thought perhaps you might help me to clear this thing off. For it has got to be cleared off somehow. I simply can't meet the man as it is."

Doniphan's look softened, for he had a special respect for the truth when told under difficulties, and no one could have seen Reggie then and suspected him of playing a part. His distress was too obviously genuine. Yet Doniphan stuck closely to his point.

"I wonder if it ever struck you," he said after a pause, "that your salvation rests entirely with yourself. I was down at your studio some weeks since with Madge, just before you came back.' I don't pretend to be a connoisseur in art matters, but a man can hardly spend ten years in Italy, as I have, without learning something about it. I saw enough of your work to know that you could make a living, and a very handsome living, if you chose. I also saw what I should estimate as four or five thousand dollars' worth of bric-a-brac, if that kind of thing brings anything like what it did in 1870."

"You don't mean you would have me sell it!" Reggie exclaimed, with as much horror as if Doniphan had asked him to sell his soul. "It would be the same thing as selling my profession; I simply couldn't work without it."

"Then neither your work nor you amount to much," Doniphan returned composedly.

"Would you like to sell your books?" This was a brilliant thrust on Reggie's part, suggested by the priceless treasures he saw about him and his knowledge of Doniphan's love for them.

"Like to sell them — no! but I would sell them, and go through the misery of it twenty times over, before I'd owe money to a man I stood in the same relation to that you stand to Levenson, or to any one else, either, who was fool enough to get me out of it. Why try to shift the burden on me? Sacrifices, like charity, begin at home, though they are much less likely to stay there."

"I'll try; I'll think of it," Reggie said desperately, after another pause, during which Doniphan watched him closely.

"No need of that. Better decide now. It may take more courage than to shoot Leverson from behind a tree, but not more courage than you've got."

"I never said I'd shoot him from behind a tree," Reggie cried indignantly.

"Oh, well! don't let's waste time over that. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But what have you decided about the bric-a-brac?"

"I'll sell it and pay everything," Reggie said with a gulp.

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright."

"And then go to work?"

"Yes, I'll go to work."

"Good! Then I'll back you up and keep in touch with you!" Doniphan said with one of his bursts of sunshine breaking through the storm-clouds. "I'll be a much better friend to you and Madge than if I handed you over twenty-five hundred dollars. And now I must be going; the gig's been waiting at the door this twenty minutes while I've been sermonizing. Let me see," and Doniphan plunged into the pages of a small memorandum book to the instant exclusion of Reggie and Reggie's salvation.

CHAPTER XXII

“BUT KEPT ALL THESE THINGS AND PONDERED THEM IN
HER HEART”

WHEN Margaret reached her room that night, she found that Levenson had already retired, his peaceful slumbers being quite audible through the carefully bolted door of his dressing room. She knew, of course, that he must have been cognizant of what she had done; his not finding her at Elmhurst on his return, coupled with what had gone before, would have told him that without any assistance from Miss Laurie, yet he had cared so little about it that he had not even taken the trouble to sit up for her.

His arbitrary command on his departure from Elmhurst in the early evening, this subsequent dismissal of the whole subject from his mind, rather than allow it to interfere with a good night's rest, seemed horribly typical of a man who could be keenly sensitive to anything trenching on his own authority, while utterly indifferent to that side of the question which, to her, made it a question of right and wrong.

She had dismissed Alice on first entering the house, and having made sure that Levenson slept, had returned to the broad window-seat of her own chamber, where she sat looking out on the profound calm, still reigning in the world outside.

It was in strange contrast to the tumult of conflicting hopes, longings, doubts, and fears which struggled for mastery within her.

She had acquiesced in what Mobray Doniphan had said.

She had promised to try once more to cut out of her soul all growth, all expansion, all uplifting desire for usefulness, because in that way alone could she fulfil the letter of her bond, but she was no more convinced that it was the right thing to do than she had been before.

That Doniphan's controlling thought in all that he had said to her had been the guarding her from a greater danger never for an instant entered her mind; that the circumstances of her life held all the elements of her own ruin, from the religious and social point of view, she was far too innocent to even guess.

She used every argument she could conjure up upon the other side. She told herself unsparingly that she was less anxious that good should come into dependent lives than that it should come through her. And that was true. Her life had been self-centred; no one knew that better than she, but would it be less so when she had thrown these poor little ambitions aside and had devoted herself to the small social triumphs which belonged to the part assigned her?

She tried her best as she analyzed her motives in what she had done that night, to find some real flaw in them that she might honestly repent of.

Ever since that day at the Lindleys', Thallon had quite impersonally represented to her a force working toward better things, — things all the more precious to have come through strife.

He had spoken of it as something new in his life; had implied that this evolution of the better in himself had come through her, and she was forced to admit that in that last confession she had found her keenest pleasure.

She had thought of that when she had succumbed, almost without a protest to Doniphan's words, to the overwhelming consciousness that such a man could take part against her. Her great comfort lay in the fact that if she succeeded in making her sacrifice complete, "*he* would know."

She clung to that human sympathy and comprehension with the more tenacity that at times everything else seemed tottering. It was rather curious that though her religion could have asked nothing harder of her than this man had asked, it seemed when she turned to it so cold and lifeless, while his face shone out in comprehension and pity, in spite of all its firmness.

If she could hold on to mere human tenderness like that, why could she not grasp the Grand Central Truth of an Infinite Fatherhood of which Doniphan had reminded her in those last words of his, even if she could not realize the Christian conception of an Incarnate God?

A vision of Ashton Levenson, completely satisfied with his own character, ruthlessly indifferent to anything outside his own desires, nay, utterly unconscious of anything beyond them, demanding and getting all he wanted, — a personification of what his world called success, — thrust itself between her and her belief.

How could she help holding Infinite Power responsible for triumphant wrong? Yet her instinct at the moment was not that of the fool who crieth, "There is no God!" but that of a bruised and crushed soul that asks in its suffering, "How can this thing be?"

Margaret Levenson, not yet one and twenty, was facing the most impenetrable of all mysteries, — the mystery of evil. It rang in her ears in that one line of Lowell: —

Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne.

Suddenly she paused as if to listen. The *wrong* of which Lowell wrote *was* no longer on the throne; nay more, the very men who had held it there no longer regretted its dethronement. The purification had come slowly, but it had come in God's own time, when men had earned it with poured-out blood and treasure, — not before.

The terrible rigidity of the oath which bound her seemed

to burn itself into her very soul; an oath she must answer for at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts should be disclosed.

She met the awful challenge with a passionate, inward cry. How could she have known? She had been a mere child; her father had told her that her mother would have wished it. Aunt Abby had said it would be the making of Ashton. It had seemed to her the opening of an enormous field for usefulness, Ashton himself had entered so anxiously into all her suggestions; he had been so much in love with her then.

In that first dim realization of her own powerlessness she sank on her knees in a flood of contrition as scalding as the tears which filled those eyes of hers, so unused to tears. Why had she asked to know? Why had she asked to see? She was not called to guide the world; nor even to guide herself. Merely to keep her promise, *and wait.*

She felt stronger with the coming thought. She resolved to throw herself with renewed enthusiasm into those small matters which were all important to Leverson. Her New York and Newport seasons had always seemed to her very full of a kind of gayety for which she personally cared nothing, but of which Ashton was extravagantly fond, whenever he had enough ready money to entertain as he liked. Though her personal allowance was extremely small, compared to the calls made upon it, and paid over to her with considerable irregularity, Leverson never begrudged his wife's running up bills for expensive dressing if he were allowed to take his time in paying them.

She lay awake for another hour after getting to bed, trying to realize the importance of all this. She could readily get assistance in the task of planning draperies. Mildred would spend weeks consulting with dressmakers, if one or two combinations for her own use were included

in the catalogue, and there would be no trouble on that score, for Mildred was to be at the Newport place in August.

When the morrow came, she had slept exactly two hours, but it had been enough to give her the strength she needed. She was young, and her physical health was perfect. It was in the gray of the early morning that she got up; she was impatient to be stirring, pleased that her hands were as firm as ever as she completed a toilet upon which she had bestowed more care than usual, selecting a morning dress she thought Levenson fancied, — not because he had said so, but because he had not said anything to the contrary.

She went downstairs cautiously that she might disturb no one at an hour sacred in Elmhurst to profound slumber. The servants, of course, were astir at the back of the house, the great front door wide open for the early morning airing, but she met none of her own species, which was quite as she wished it to be.

Once outside, however, she was greeted by an on-rush of dogs just released from their kennels in the rear, a friendliness which fitted better into her mood. She managed to keep them quiet by a judicious distribution of carresses and an immediate adjournment to the garden, feeling herself freshening wonderfully under the stimulant of the morning air and the evident sincerity of these demonstrations of canine affection.

Turning abruptly to the left past the yew hedges, she walked on briskly through the great rear garden, following a path which led with many curves and windings toward the landing at the river.

Margaret had just descended a short flight of stone steps, built into the first of a series of terraces breaking the sharp decline, when she came unexpectedly upon two figures moving more slowly in the same direction and bent, apparently, like herself, on taking the morning air,

Though their backs were toward her, she recognized them on the instant as Miss Laurie's maid, Celeste, and that unfortunate dependent, Jane Kirk.

Margaret came to an abrupt halt, a feeling of annoyance taking possession of her; for her overwhelming desire at the moment was to be alone. Her feeling for the feeble-minded Jane had never got beyond the bounds of ordinary pity, for Miss Laurie's wishes as to having the woman left alone were well known at Elmhurst, but there had always been something about the other woman, Celeste, which she positively disliked.

Even at that instant when the woman, hearing Margaret's light footfall, turned and saw her and stood aside on the pathway to let the lady of Elmhurst pass, as any well-trained servant would have done, — even then there was a subtle, indefinable quality in her manner which, could it have been called anything, would have been called insolent.

She was tall, dark, and strikingly handsome, and though her deep rich coloring was so near the tone of burnished copper as to suggest Indian or African blood, her features had all the clear-cut regularity of the high-class European. Her irreproachable gravity was not in the least shaken by the necessity of keeping a restraining hand upon the arm of her charge, who had evidently been startled by this sudden appearance of Mrs. Leverson, and now stood there staring at her with sharp suspicion while she mumbled to herself in some unintelligible jargon. Margaret's first sensation of annoyance gave way to genuine sympathy as she glanced at the suffering woman.

"You are out early," she said with a kindly glance at Jane Kirk, though she, of course, addressed Celeste. "I hope your patient is no worse."

The woman nodded her head almost imperceptibly, and formed the two words "Very bad," with her lips with-

out pronouncing them, for Jane was following every movement made by either with hawklike keenness. Suddenly she concentrated into the look she had fixed on Margaret a wealth of crafty cunning which lighted up a face a moment before absolutely vacant.

"We're not the only people who can't sleep at Elmhurst," she remarked in a confidential whisper though the words were perfectly clear. "They keep *you* up too, — the woman and the man who looks like her and like him too. You must have gone to see him last night; I know you did, for I heard you come in late, though Celeste denied it. I would have gone to him myself long ago if I'd dared, but they watch me so day and night — day and night. They're afraid I'll give him what I've got hidden, but they needn't be. No one shall ever have it but Ashton — Ashton Leverson. Who has ever loved him as I have loved him? Didn't I nurse him? — yet they let you come and go as you will, — you who hate him."

The last words were said with sudden fury, the voice rising so that she fairly flung this accusation at Margaret with withering scorn, while her thin clinched hands and wild eyes suggested the imminence of a personal attack.

But with the quickness of lightning Celeste's strong hands had caught the woman's wrists, and she was looking steadily down into eyes that had already begun to shrink before hers.

"You will only do him harm by this," she said with slow impressiveness. "He would be very angry if he knew you had behaved so. He would send you away. If this lady were to tell him what you have done, he would send you away at once."

Margaret had turned deadly pale, not from any sense of personal danger, for she had none, but from the horrid malignancy that seemed to underlie the woman's crazy words.

As soon as she saw poor Jane reduced to penitent tears at Celeste's threat, she said with a touch of severity: —

"Mr. Leverson must be told of this, of course. Neither he nor I had any idea she was in this state."

"I beg, madam, you will do nothing hastily without consulting Miss Laurie," the woman returned, with something less than her usual calmness. "Jane is very seldom like this, and would not be so at all if we could keep her completely by ourselves. The sight of so many strangers is what upsets her. She'll be perfectly rational when the family's away in August."

Margaret turned abruptly and walked on toward the river without answering this argument. It was quite clear to her that her errand of the night before had aroused discussion below stairs which had reached Celeste, and through her had made its impression on Jane Kirk's crazy brain. The thought itself would have been a sufficient humiliation, even if she had not caught some sort of confirmation of it out of the corner of Celeste's respectfully lowered eyes.

All the beauty seemed gone out of the morning sunlight. She got through the hour and a half before breakfast time idly watching the river from a seat in an old summer-house, but she felt thankful when her watch told her it was time to go back.

The Colonel was already in his place, and Miss Laurie had started to pour the coffee when she got in. Margaret claimed her place with her usual morning salutations.

"I hardly looked for you so early," the old lady said, with more than her usual politeness; "you deserved an extra half hour, you were up so late. Who brought you back, child? I know you drove, because I heard the wheels. I suppose it was the Faucons', wasn't it?"

"No, Mr. Doniphan," Margaret returned, as she handed the Colonel's coffee to Morgan who at the moment was more sphinxlike than ever.

"Oh, then you did go to the hospital after all," the Colonel put in absently from behind the morning paper, as he caught the words. "It was a scandalous affair — perfectly scandalous. Doniphan told me that they'd got wind of the rascal who did it, and I only hope they'll catch him. I shall step in and see Cheeseman on my way to the train, — I've got to catch the nine-twenty. By the way, though I'm back in Brockton to-morrow for the Levenson special meeting, I shall hardly get out to Elmhurst, as I've got work with our Executive Committee at Harrisburg in the afternoon, so I may not see you again before you're off for Newport."

Margaret had never, perhaps, felt more grateful to her father in her life than for the way he had come to her assistance without in the least knowing what he was doing. He chatted on pleasantly about various matters until he took his departure just after Levenson made his appearance. No one at Elmhurst was in the least ceremonious, but the Colonel felt more comfortable to shake hands with his son-in-law at parting, after accepting four weeks' board and lodging for himself and his unmarried daughter. That was what the Colonel would have called "belonging to the old school."

As for the head of the house, he appeared quite unusually gracious, though he did not go out of his way to include Margaret in such signs of condescension as he bestowed on Mildred, for example, when she presently put in her appearance, smothering a yawn behind a lace-edged handkerchief.

It struck Margaret that this lack of any demonstration toward herself indicated, under the circumstances, a certain refinement of feeling which she instantly reproached herself for not having seen in him before. In this new self-abasement she was on the lookout for everything that was best in him.

Leverson always spent an unconscionable time over his breakfast, and to-day he was even longer than usual. Glancing leisurely through a batch of New York Sunday newspapers, which he had not found time to finish yesterday afternoon, he nevertheless managed to say a good deal to Mildred about the Newport plans. If he cherished any ill feeling toward his wife for her abominable behavior of the night before, he showed it, if at all, in more or less excluding her from his references to these forthcoming gayeties.

It was: "We must really get that in." "There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't stay on for that." "The Colonel says you won't have to be back in Harrisburg before late September, and you wouldn't have to come then if I hadn't promised to take him down to Currituck duck shooting."

Mildred was delightfully responsive. The Gilbreed family, as represented by the Colonel and his younger daughter, had never been more appreciative of the Leverson advantages. If it occurred to Margaret that considering she was expected to chaperon the girl Mildred might have shown some acknowledgment of the fact, she frowned down the idea as unworthy of that larger view of things she had determined upon. She knew that Mildred, with her keen sense of the proprieties, would have been far from satisfied with the kind of oversight she would have got out of Miss Laurie, but on the other hand, Margaret told herself she was not going to Newport on Mildred's account, but on Leverson's.

At length Ashton rose and sauntered off into his study to light his cigar; Miss Laurie went upstairs, as she always did after breakfast, to get her crochet work; while Mildred, picking up a novel from the sideboard, where she had laid it on coming downstairs, wandered out on to the veranda.

As Margaret had been waiting for this opportunity for

something like eight hours, she lost no time in following Levenson into the study, closing the door behind her. He had seated himself with his bundle of papers beside the open window, but when he saw her enter the room, he got up again; Levenson never treated his wife to that amount of politeness unless he was on his guard. He thought he knew pretty well what was coming. He even felt a certain sort of impersonal interest as to how it was going to turn out.

"You don't mind my smoking?" he asked, moving a chair for her.

She shook her head without speaking. For the moment she could not speak the hard lump in her throat hurt her so cruelly. She leaned heavily against the back of the chair he had placed for her, but made no movement to take it. Levenson, considering he had been sufficiently courteous, relapsed into his own easy-chair and took up one of his newspapers, though he did not begin to read. If she had anything to say, he was quite ready to hear it; he was rather curious than otherwise to see what sort of a case she could make out.

"You know already that I went to the hospital last night after you left Elmhurst," she began as soon as she felt she could control her voice.

Levenson's face lit up with a disagreeable smile, but he only nodded by way of answer.

"I have come to acknowledge that I was very much in the wrong to have done what you distinctly forbade my doing," she went on slowly. "I want to ask your pardon for that before anything else."

"Did Doniphan tell you to say this?" Levenson asked, his color rising slightly as he glanced up at her from over the top of his paper.

The question was a staggering one to Margaret. It had not entered her mind that it would be necessary to drag Mr. Doniphan into the discussion. She had been willing

to drink the cup of self-abasement to the dregs, but this added bitterness seemed so useless. Leverson, not of course following the trend of her thoughts, took her silence for assent.

"Odd," he muttered to himself, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar on to the carpet. "What nasty object can he have in patching this thing up?"

It was not very long before that Margaret Leverson would have "fired up" at the innuendo, but at the moment it did not seem to her as if even this "mattered." She recognized then, as she never had before, that Leverson had her in his keeping to do with as he liked. Men may make what marriage laws they please to "protect" the woman. If she be what is called "a good woman," the power to make or mar her life rests with the man, because God made it so, and to God he shall answer some day for the trust.

"Mr. Doniphan only advised me, because I met him at the hospital and told him what I had done," Margaret answered in a voice that betrayed her weariness though her manner was very earnest. "I can see now that was an additional fault, but it was entirely mine. I can understand perfectly why you should be annoyed that any one outside ourselves should know of any difference between us. I was so wretched I seemed to forget everything, even proper pride."

"I beg you won't misunderstand me," Leverson returned in his coolest tone, for he could well afford to keep cool in the presence of this utter breakdown of all opposition, which, while it pleased, rather surprised him. "On my own account I have no objection whatever to any publicity you choose to give to your relationship with Mobray Doniphan or any of your other masculine admirers, though I do wish, for your sake, you showed better taste in choosing them. Poor Doniphan is so painfully old and ugly that

he appears somewhat ridiculous in the light of a lady's champion, and as for this young man Thallon, his being one of my own hired servants makes my resenting your rather marked interest in him out of the question."

Leverson got that far in a perfectly even voice, but here, chancing to glance at his wife, he surprised an expression on her face, of mingled horror and amazement, that struck him as out of all proportion to what he had intended as a half-playful accusation. As has been said, he did not believe his wife capable of any grave wrongdoing; he had merely taken advantage of the situation to frighten her into a submission likely to last some little time. His own inherent coarseness made it impossible for him to realize the misery of such a view to her. Her whole attitude and expression seemed to imply that she had not even dreamed of the possibility of such a view, and this, curiously enough, enraged him. He had no intention of allowing her to play the part of misguided innocence; she might have intended no unfaithfulness, but this pretended ignorance that there was such a thing was a little too much. With all his faults Leverson was no hypocrite. Though very susceptible to flattery, he was so merely because sufficiently conceited to believe in its sincerity. He never flattered anybody else, least of all his wife. Her obvious insincerity roused his righteous ire, and he went on with voice and color both rising:—

"It was entirely on your own account that I gave you a friendly word of warning last night before you put the crowning touch to your absurdity. My protecting myself against the consequences of your behavior lies entirely in my own hands. You may go where you please, do what you please, know whom you please, hold any relationship you please, but by the living Jingo, you shan't hold them while you are living with me as my wife. I can certainly stand a grass-widowhood if you can."

She knew he had the power to make his threat good. No woman of Margaret's antecedents braves the finger of the world without a shudder; half a dozen careless words from him would turn it upon her relentlessly. In her most dread forebodings of the night before it had not entered her mind that he would take this course. She had told herself over and over again that it was she who was exaggerating the seriousness of the difference between them. A frank acknowledgment that she had been hasty, in error, with some little explanation of her meaning, would set it right. She blamed herself with not having begun with such an explanation, though her only reason for omitting it had been that he would take it as an excuse.

"Ashton," she began, concentrating all her strength on keeping her voice steady, "I have not been intentionally disloyal to you in any word or deed." She had stopped abruptly, and the color rushed to her face as she remembered what she had said to Doniphan.

"Why don't you go on?" Levenson inquired with something very like a sneer.

"Because that was not altogether true. When Mr. Doniphan blamed me for having gone to the hospital without your permission — I mean against your command — I told him you had not bought my soul, that there were things which seemed to me imperatively right, that I must do at all costs, even against such commands."

"Now we are getting at it," Levenson here put in encouragingly. "It was probably on the same ground that you discussed with young Thallon the advisability of his keeping on in my employ, and especially of his continuing to assist me in my literary work, which I understand you assured him was unworthy of his talents, because it was ineffably stupid. It was this probably that made you urge him to cast in his lot with a very disreputable journal, the chief purpose of which is to run a political opposition

to your own father. All these things were doubtless 'imperatively right,' but you'll excuse me for saying that coming from you they were in deuced bad taste and can hardly be said to come within the boundaries of ideal loyalty."

It was really not necessary for Levenson to have gone quite so far in order to complete her humiliation. If he got any satisfaction in looking at the girl's face, which instead of softening had turned hard as stone, he was welcome to it.

"We may as well look at this thing squarely," Levenson went on quite dispassionately again, for it was impossible to keep up the fires of wrath when no one would answer him. "A month or two ago it might have been difficult to have hit on any plan which would have given us a chance to play the harmony act, but lately a lucky turn of the wheel has made it possible for me to offer you a choice of alternatives, one of which ought in all conscience to satisfy you. You have never cared a brass farthing about me, and as a natural consequence I can't be expected to go on indefinitely caring about you, but quite outside of sentiment, we might manage to live together in peace. If you wish to stick to your marriage rights, I have as yet no choice but to go on as we are, but always with the distinct understanding that you sail under my orders. If, however, you want your liberty, I'm perfectly ready to turn you over to the Colonel with a decent settlement, provided you tell him with your own lips that the break-up's your own choice. All this is made possible by the agreeable fact that I'm going to leave Brockton within a week for good and all. I've just sold the Levenson Car Works. It's the best turn I've had this long time. Within two, or at farthest three, months, I shall be simply swimming in money. For the first time in my life I shall do as I please. When it's once done, this miserable little hole may sink to the bottom of the sea for anything I care."

He paused, presumably to see the effect of this announcement, but just then Margaret's capacity for further suffering was at an end. She stood there staring down at him stupidly — yes, for the first time in her life she looked stupid — her face as expressionless as white paper.

"Now, what I wanted to say," he went on carefully, "was that I don't care anything about legal freedom. My interests don't require anything of that kind, and I don't suppose yours do. I could well afford to settle Elmhurst, as well as the income, on you for life in such a quiet way as to create no gossip. You could go on living here almost indefinitely, waiting for me to come back from Europe. I really don't see how you could expect me to do more; I'm giving you your choice between the two. If you go with me, you take your place in the world as becomes my wife, and you take my standards for your standards, as you'll take me, without question. It's as brilliant a place as would satisfy most women, though I don't expect you to be grateful; for gratitude, I've discovered, doesn't run in the Gilbreed family. I loaned Reggie twenty-five hundred two weeks ago, and when I met him at the hospital last night his manner was positively insolent. However, we won't waste time going into details; you can tell me in half a dozen words whether you want to go or stay."

The girl had walked over to one of the long windows which opened on the back piazza with the beautiful old-fashioned garden just below, and beyond it, in the distance, the river. She stood with her back to him looking out, one arm and hand lost in the folds of the heavy curtain, the other raised to her hot forehead in an effort to quiet its throbbing.

She had by no means followed all he had said, and all she followed she had not understood. But she understood enough to know that she was at a crisis of her life. Her poor little plans making toward mutual confidence lay in

small pieces at her feet. They had not amounted to much, of course. She had intended to show a limitless interest in all he wanted to do, and in return, at the end, if things went well, to plead for some small comprehension of her own aims and purposes. She smiled to herself a hard little smile as she faced this very different problem with which her aims and purposes had nothing whatever to do. Her eyes caught the glint of the river where it turned the bend below the landing. Beyond the bend lay the long ill-smelling wharves of Brockton, backed by their rows on rows of warehouses and factories, the coal pockets, lumber yards, and tall chimneys, all black with the soft coal smoke. Farther back still lay the quiet streets with their wide, old-fashioned gardens, and solid, square, old-fashioned houses. It was not a very striking picture, but it was that, and not the stately Elmhurst with all its luxury, which called to her so beseechingly to stay with them and let this man go his own way. She tried to argue with herself that she could do no good to him or any one else by going; tried to argue that her failure as a wife had, for all time, been registered within the last ten minutes.

And the reverse of the shield was so alluring, so subtly tempting. She could reject the insulting offer of the money with the scorn that was already scorching her tongue for utterance. She could take him at his word, and let him go,—go on leading his miserable, worthless life,—while she, freed from this living death, this moral leprosy, rose to a proper place in a life of her own making.

After all, would it not be the righting of her own error? In plain terms, had she not married Ashton Levenson for his money, none the less so that she had wanted to use it for others, not for herself? Could she undo that now?

The raised arm had dropped, and she was nervously clasping and unclasping those expressive hands of hers, the fingers of the right mechanically turning a little gold ring

on the third finger of the left. As she glanced down at it, Doniphan's words came back to her, "To be true to yourself you must first be true to that." Ah, but now—now that he had offered her a release from her promise, was it not, could it not be made, merely a question between themselves? Had she not a perfect right to take him at his word?

But the sophistry was apparent to her even for the instant she harbored it. They did not stand alone. The man had no power to release her from her oath because it chafed him as well as her. Not of her own volition could she break it. The thing in itself was sacred, the corner-stone of a nation's morals.

She knew that Leverson was watching her with a cynical smile. She knew—and the knowledge filled the measure he had given her until it seemed pressed down and running over—that if she conquered the wild longing for liberty, which was struggling with a last desperate attempt to have its way, she knew he would set it down to mercenary motives. Nevertheless she put that back of her as she had put all else. The man was her husband; he had committed no crime. Did it matter, after all, what he or any one else thought of her motives? It was not necessary she should claim any lofty motive—make any claim at all. The choice was before her—all she had to do was to decide.

She walked over to the hall door with recovered firmness. With her hand on its bronze knob she turned and looked at him with an expression that was entirely beyond him.

"I shall go with you," she said in a voice that sounded strangely even in her own ears.

An instant later the door had closed behind her and Leverson was alone with his triumph.

CHAPTER XXIII

MOBRAY DONIPHAN FINDS HIMSELF OUT OF HIS ELEMENT

WHEN Doniphan left the shelter of Brockton's magnificent police force, he did so no wiser about the Dupré affair than when he had entered it fifteen minutes before. Finding no later news from Lancaster than was already his by telephone, the disappointed applicant for news, after a word or two about the case with the astute Cheeseman, clambered back into the carryall bent on finding Meyer.

As the small brick structure he had just left lay on Judd Street near Main, he had quite a drive before he reached the densely populated tenement district back of the river where he knew Meyer had his headquarters over a saloon and corner grocery.

He had stopped there several times before on his afternoon drives about town to exchange a few words with this curious man, who had excited his active observation ever since he had first encountered him one Saturday night escorting home Pat Egan and his wife Molly, both fighting drunk.

Mr. and Mrs. Egan occupied what might have been termed a prominent position in their own particular coterie, and their marital difficulties afforded much the same kind of spicy gossip on the stairs leading to their apartments as, in a higher stratum, finds its way into the columns of our best newspapers. Hence the crowd which had followed on the heels of Mr. and Mrs. Egan that Saturday evening

had been large and demonstrative, filling the air with loud applause when Mrs. Egan had declared her intention of cutting out Mr. Egan's liver, or when the gentleman had quite naturally retaliated by attempting to give his lady a second black eye.

Doniphan's first impulse, like that of any other sensible man, had been to call the police, but a quick word of appeal from Meyer, who must have seen his intention, changed his plans.

"If you can hold back the crowd, I can get them home," he had said rather breathlessly; "I don't want them locked up."

It rather surprised Doniphan, when he came to think of it afterwards, that he had complied. He was not in the habit of taking orders from any one, certainly not from revivalist preachers of the Brockton slums, but at the moment he quite forgot that what he was doing was not in accord with his own best judgment. Without exactly knowing why, he had found himself making a rather energetic little speech to a variegated audience, whose attention he succeeded in holding, more, probably, through the novelty of such a man's speaking to them at all, than from anything he said.

Anyhow, he had succeeded in covering Meyer's retreat, and ever since he had been conscious of a feeling of comradeship with this singular personality whom he had not known before, even by sight.

He climbed the two flights of rickety stairs which led up between the corner grocery on one side and the saloon on the other, to what Meyer called his "Church" on the third floor, with rather mixed feelings this Monday morning.

Without Doniphan's having intended it at all, Meyer had taken his place in this Dupré affair, and the Dupré affair, spreading out its tendrils of evil consequences on all sides, as is the way with such plants of ill omen, touched

some people and some things vitally close to Doniphan, notably Leverson, and through Leverson, Margaret.

Doniphan was not enjoying his day's work as he groped his way through the upper hall, which was pitchy dark, until his hand came in contact with a broken door-knob. Nevertheless, he opened the door resolutely, finding himself in a long, narrow apartment, running the entire depth of the third story, which bore signs of recently removed interior partitions, the walls being papered with large and small squares of different kinds of wall-paper in various stages of dilapidation.

Three small windows at the front and as many in the rear gave the place what daylight it had, and though light by contrast with the hall outside, the proximity of abutting walls, which came up close to the rear windows, made that end of the room dusky even at this hour of the morning.

Doniphan could with difficulty discern a slightly raised platform backed by a folding screen, several illuminated scriptural texts in cheap black walnut frames which hung at intervals on the side walls, while below them a motley collection of chairs and benches ranged in rows gave the place what appearance it had of an assembly or meeting room.

At his entrance the place was so still that it impressed Doniphan as untenanted, but almost at that moment a figure rose from one of the front benches where it had been bending over some work, and, revealing itself in silhouette against the gray light of the window, was recognized by the intruder as the rather marked figure of the Preacher.

He spoke rapidly to an assistant beside him,— a tall, spare man with a consumptive cough, — then came forward toward this late arrival with a smile of recognition.

"I cannot shake hands," he remarked apologetically in his careful English, as Doniphan held out his with instinc-

tive friendliness. "Joel and I are cleaning the lamps, and it is very dirty work. I was out late last night at the hospital, so we are behind time this morning."

"Yes, I remember," Doniphan returned a little absently, "you were there last night. Mr. Thallon was doing well?"

"But this morning not so well," Meyer went on in his serious way. "I was there an hour or two ago. He had more fever; they would not let me see him."

"I am sorry to hear this," Doniphan said anxiously. "I am on my way there now; I won't keep you long from your work."

"Do not speak of it," the Revivalist put in with grave politeness. "We are only getting ready for to-night, when we are to hold a meeting for the raftsmen. It is their busy season, as you know. After they deliver their timber at the mills, they get their pay and spend it all before they go back again, within a day or two, which is not right. But it is not of them I should speak; it is rather what can I do for you?"

He asked the question as if his being expected to do something were the natural inference of this call, as, perhaps, of all other calls upon his time, but his tone was singularly free from any suggestion of weariness; it seemed to imply an inherent happiness in this doing for others which had no relation whatever to the class or creed of the recipient. High or low, rich or poor, free-thinker or papist, it was all one to him, if they but asked his aid.

But the alacrity with which he had welcomed this newcomer had a much deeper significance than this. He had found Mobray Doniphan doing what he himself believed to be his Master's work, and had classed him instantly as a Disciple, a fact which, had it been known to Doniphan, would have greatly embarrassed him. But Doniphan did not know, and so the whole trend of what followed was more or less a puzzle to him.

They stood by this time out of Joel's hearing, by the brighter light of the front window, Doniphan's eyes fixed with some misgivings on one of the framed texts which in this part of the room were easily readable. Doniphan had a prejudice against framed texts. They were always connected in his mind with the enlarged and crayoned photographs in the Lindley front parlor. They seemed to leave the same impression on the brain of well-meaning but misdirected effort.

Doniphan did not allow himself to dwell upon it. Almost as the man spoke, he was answering him with his usual brisk, businesslike brevity.

"I came to tell you that Dupré is not yet captured, which is the same thing as saying that Louise Dupré is in danger. He will do the girl harm if he succeeds in finding her. Either she, or the people in whose charge you have placed her, must be warned of this at once. I had all the details of your part in her rescue from young Mr. Gilbreed this morning. It was well done, but it must be followed up with this warning, or it may have been done for nothing."

"All that can be done by human means has been done already," Meyer returned gravely. "I wrote last night to the Sister in charge of the Home where we placed her. It must have reached there this morning. Antoine Dupré would count on our doing this, yet he is a desperate man, and might even then attempt seeing her. If he does, I have written that he is to be given up to justice. It is the only course consistent with his own safety as well as hers."

"You're quite right, quite right," Doniphan nodded with great satisfaction, for he had been far from certain that Meyer, who had never shown great confidence in the police, would sanction anything of this kind. "The fellow is an unmitigated rascal, and the sooner we have

him behind prison bars the better. If young Thallon dies, I shall take unalloyed pleasure in seeing him hung."

The light in Meyer's face seemed to suddenly die out; that ineffable sadness which always seemed to lurk beneath the surface of his sunniest smile softened the face rather than hardened it. He stood there looking dreamily out at the patch of blue sky which showed through the small upper window. Presently he turned to Doniphan and said gravely:—

"Should we not remember also that he is a man suffering from deep and undeserved wrong?"

"And has made others suffer, too," Doniphan added significantly. "Antoine Dupré has drunk deep these many years; who's responsible for that?"

"Many besides himself, — but let that pass! Hold him to strict account, as this modern world holds all its outcasts, it still remains that the malice with which he struck this blow came to him first through his love for his child."

"His love for his child did not prevent his beating her pretty liberally when he had her in his gentle keeping," Doniphan put in with some scorn.

"True, he was and is brutal," Meyer admitted without apology; "but even brutality, when born of indignation at wanton wrong, may be better than indifference to it. The man was once honest and frugal, with the love of the home which belongs to the French Canadian. The girl, from the first, though capable of great affection, perhaps even because of it, had this taint in her, and he knew it. If he knew no way to correct it but the way he took, whose fault was it?"

Meyer had again fixed his eyes upon his companion, but the light in them had changed to a deep red flame that glowed in their depths as if it might consume him. Still he went on speaking in the same level voice, answering his

own question, as Doniphan, most unusually for him, seemed to have no answer ready.

"Ours, Mr. Doniphan! Ours! We should have been here earlier, we should have worked harder; we might have prevented where we must now correct. We have lost that first opportunity, here in our very midst, which will never come again. But there will be others, sir; there will be others!"

Doniphan did not like this at all. If Meyer, after working as report said he had, on an average ten hours a day for the greater part of his life, chose to call himself a miserable sinner because he had not regenerated the world, that was his affair; but it struck Doniphan as rather uncivil, and quite unnecessary, to include *him* in the general confession. True, he had done almost nothing for the class of which they had been speaking, but only because he had concentrated his energies on a much more hopeful one. Doniphan's influence among the upper grades of workmen and skilled mechanics was well known. He had probably saved Henderson County more money by nipping incipient strikes in the bud than any other man inside its boundaries, — and he was rather proud of the fact.

Still, he was not small minded, and just then, least of all, was he inclined to cavil at trifles. He had come to ask Meyer a favor, — for he now regarded the Dupré affair as quite his own piece of property, — and had found it already done. He could afford to ignore references to his own sinfulness, especially as it was merely a part of the phraseology of these people, harmonizing perfectly with the framed texts and the rows of benches and the platform.

He had turned to go when he paused abruptly, as if he had forgotten something and was trying to think what it was. As a matter of fact, however, he was merely debating with himself whether he should speak to Meyer of the side of this miserable affair which touched him most closely.

It had been as keenly painful to Doniphan as it had been to Reggie that a man of Meyer's class should have even a superficial knowledge of something which nearly concerned Margaret Levenson's honor, but for that very reason he was anxious to ascertain how much he knew and give to him a word of warning as to the sacredness of the trust.

"You have learned nothing more about the—the gentleman seen with the girl?" he asked, lowering his voice a tone or two, though their speech had been carefully guarded before.

"No more than I already knew, but more than I have from the first thought it safe to tell Mr. Gilbreed," Meyer returned, answering the look as well as the words. "I should perhaps, however, in justice to Dupré, tell *you*, I saw this man with Louise Dupré the afternoon before she went away. She had left the shoe factory at the East End at about five, and was coming home through Shooter's Lane. I was on my way to see one of the hands who had been taken ill at the factory that afternoon when I came upon them. She must have been late getting out; all the other hands had gone on. She was alone there with him in the lane, he on his light gray horse; she standing close to the saddle, both talking earnestly—so earnestly that until I was almost upon them, they did not notice me. The girl saw me first, and stepped back into the road, her face deep crimson, her eyes scornful as always, though she had been crying. Her movement made the man turn in his saddle and stare at me. I recognized him instantly though he did not recognize me. You know who the man was, Mr. Doniphan."

Doniphan flushed with annoyance, not only at the other's complete understanding of his own suspicions, but his evident power to make them certainties. Meyer's failure to use the word "gentleman" where he, Doniphan, had used it, had not escaped his observation. It implied a capacity

in Meyer for passing judgment which Doniphan would have preferred to keep to himself.

"Yes, I suppose I know," he returned with one of his impatient little snorts. "This is a most delicate matter, Meyer, about which Mr. Gilbreed has thought it best to take you into his confidence, — a matter which nearly concerns the honor of his family. As I too am in his confidence, we must together guard it carefully."

"Mr. Gilbreed has told me nothing I did not already know," the Revivalist returned with a simple directness which entirely disarmed Doniphan's craftiness; "but you are wrong if you think I have learned all this with no thought of that gracious lady, so fair, so beautiful, who is his wife. Even she must suffer, as we all suffer for sins not our own. It is our common portion, because only through that are we knit together in a common brotherhood. Her face came up before me that day in the lane as I had seen it before, beautiful and noble because suffering for others, though she has not as yet suffered for Christ, the most beautiful suffering of all. It came to me then that this sin had been revealed to me even in its first sprouting that I might uproot and destroy it."

Meyer's voice had changed abruptly with these last words from its former soft melancholy to a stronger, more commanding note. His long, thin hands clinched themselves tightly until the nails seemed to cut into the flesh. Doniphan made no response. He was watching the other eagerly.

"I spoke sternly to him, even as Christ spoke to those who had defiled the Temple," the Revivalist went on, "and when he would have turned, I seized his horse's bridle that he should listen to what I had to say. His face was black with rage and he struck at me savagely with his stick, though without speaking, — struck me a glancing blow on the shoulder. The horse reared, my hold was

loosened, and in an instant he was gone, riding madly down the lane, — gone like some spirit of darkness leaving a stain behind it."

"And the girl?" Doniphan asked.

"She too had gone when I recovered consciousness."

"Then you were badly hurt," Doniphan put in with quick compunction at his own thoughtlessness. He had had no time to think of Meyer.

"That was nothing," the man returned hastily. "I tried to see the girl that night, but she had only come home to dress, and had gone out again directly after supper. I did not dare to tell her father, but spent the night trying to find her. He came to me the next morning, as I had expected, with the news of her flight. The rest you know. I went with him to Mr. Gilbreed's in hopes that he could or would help us. Finding that useless, I made up my mind to go to the city the next day in quest of her. That evening Mr. Thallon came and asked me to accompany Mr. Gilbreed on the same errand, saying that Mr. Gilbreed had changed his mind and that he was willing to help me. We had, as you know, some success, but the danger that threatens Louise Dupré is not from her father, but from this other man. He must be dealt with sternly in the fear of God, for his own sake as well as hers. He must be *recalled to life*, to the knowledge of his own suffering, his own misery."

"Misery! He will never know a moment's discomfort, much less misery, for anything he has ever done or ever will do," Doniphan growled, forgetful in his anger before whom he spoke, for the ejaculation had been more to himself than to the other man.

"There is always hope. Judgment is not ours. His lot has been so much harder than most others, so clouded, so benumbing, so narrow. Some one must show him what it might be made. It is borne in upon me I must see him

again," the Preacher said with some return of his old enthusiasm.

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind," Doniphan put in hastily. "As you know, I have Louise Dupré's welfare quite as much at heart as you can have, but I am in a much better position to deal with this — this — chief offender than you can possibly be. I want you to keep in communication with Louise Dupré or her guardians, nothing more. Whatever else you do, take my advice and leave Ashton Levenson alone."

Meyer's description of his meeting with the man just named had only intensified the impression left on Doniphan's mind by the framed texts and the general confession. While blaming Levenson for his coarse brutality from the bottom of his heart, Doniphan had nevertheless a certain sympathy for him in his resentment against Meyer's peculiar kind of interference. When itinerant preachers began "holding up" Brockton's leading citizens by the bridle-rein and reproving them for their sins "with the sternness of Christ," things were getting decidedly unpleasant.

He remembered Lindley's telling him something about this man's making a "scene" at the inquest held over the body of the Raggles child some months before. The jury had brought in a verdict of accidental death by electricity, blaming nobody. Meyer, who had been present merely as a witness, had taken it upon himself to launch the thunders of what he had called "an outraged God" upon those responsible for the death of "one of His little ones." Lindley had been very indignant at the time, but since had shown some contrition for the sharpness with which he had closed the man's mouth. "After all," he had observed to Doniphan, "what he said was horribly true, though as the sworn public officer in charge I had to sit down on him."

Until this present interview with him that had been

Doniphan's only knowledge of a "sterner side" to Meyer; the man in his usual aspect seemed the personification of meekness. Doniphan, like Lindley, preferred him that way. It seemed more appropriate to his position. To Levenson, of course, such an interference could have appeared merely as an insolence deserving no answer, and getting none, save the answer of a blow from a heavy riding crop. Meyer probably carried the marks of it still on that delicately modelled shoulder of his underneath the workman's cotton shirt. It was quite possible for Doniphan to experience some touch of reverence for a man who could receive such a blow, and, even while roused to anger over another's wrong, harbor no personal resentment, and still feel that the man was more or less of a fool, quite incapable of being intrusted with any handling of this difficult and delicate matter. He did not leave the Preacher until he had extracted a promise from him that he would not attempt to see Levenson without his, Doniphan's, knowledge.

"I was not thinking wholly of Louise Dupré," Meyer said, as they walked slowly toward the door; "the rich have souls to save as well as the poor. God's mercy is everlasting, but it cannot be given to those who will not take it. If this man could but be convinced of sin —"

The Revivalist's face was still flushed, but it was no longer the outward sign of a deep-stirred anger, but of a passionate enthusiasm. The eyes he had fixed on Doniphan's face as he spoke were wistful and pleading, but Doniphan stuck firmly to his point.

"My dear man," he remarked grimly, "if you talk to Ashton Levenson in that way, you will simply make him add the sin of — of more personal violence to the other things he is responsible for. Be satisfied with the good you are doubtless doing here. These people are accustomed to reproof and censure. Mr. and Mrs. Egan see no

objection to having their domestic infidelities made the subject of private remonstrance or public prayer, but when you are dealing with a man of Leverson's class — "

"And is his class then beyond the need of prayer? Come, Mr. Doniphan, I know you better than you think. This world is not governed by fixed laws; if it were, you would not be here asking my help to-day."

Doniphan glanced at the man with renewed interest. He never forced his piety, but it was there. Nevertheless, he had not expected Meyer to quote from Huxley's letter to Charles Kingsley in support of it.

"You have good authority," he said, smiling, "but whatever may be said of the efficiency of prayer, I still think you had better leave Leverson to some one who knows him. I promise you his moral welfare shall not be neglected inasmuch as it touches others very dear to me, but I tell you frankly I'm sorry you know anything about it. Guard it carefully for my sake and that of the 'gracious lady,' and let us give a thought or two to matters nearer your own people. Dr. Lindley tells me you've got a church-building fund. I want to send you a small check for it, if I may."

Instead of looking grateful at this offer, Meyer merely looked embarrassed. He raised his long, thin hands with a movement of apology that suggested Hebrew blood.

"I am very sorry," he said sadly, "but the fund is all gone. I had to use it to help Madame Dupré and the children. I give very little money as a rule, but the case there was desperate. With both of the breadwinners gone, there was no choice. I made Louise promise to send some of her earnings through me, but they will be very scanty, much less than she was earning here, and the family will have to be helped for some time."

Doniphan ground his teeth when he had absorbed this terse statement of the material condition of things. It had not occurred to him before.

"Well, take the check when it comes for them," he returned with some attempt at cheerfulness, "and later we'll hope for another building fund. You need it badly," he added, glancing with some misgivings down the long room, "but God knows you may be doing more here than if you were running a first-class cathedral."

Meyer's face lit up more, perhaps, at these last words of praise than for the promised gift. "God *does* know," he said with the intense earnestness peculiar to him. "The Kingdom will come when we are ready for it. That is our work. I accept your aid very gratefully, Mr. Doniphan. It is very sadly needed. I trust you will find Mr. Thallon better. Good day, sir, good day."

Doniphan got down to the street with an odd sensation of having taken part in some religious exercise, something he had not been guilty of for nearly thirty years. He had been startled, in spite of his own cool, clear head, by the depth and power of the man he had just left; by what the man himself would have called "a living faith."

We are all alike, learned or unlearned, he thought. The Personal note has got to be struck. We must incarnate our Ideal that it may rule us, that we may fall down and worship it, or we grow cold. We tear ourselves to pieces for the sake of love—the love of a tangible, personal Presence we can hear and feel and see, and we call it Religion,—and it is. Not the highest! Not a simple recognition of the Universal Spirit, untouchable by human hands, unseeable by human eyes,—yet in all things, over all things! No, not that, but to the groping human mind, to the hungry human heart, more real than that,—as yet.

Doniphan was quite unconscious that he had repeated a creed. He was merely recognizing, with all his inherent honesty, the enormous difference between his own inspiration and that of the other man.

Johann Meyer had grasped what to him was absolute,

abstract Truth — the certainty of a glorious ending, the fulfilment of a glorious promise ; to the other all things were relative.

To him the subtile meaning of life lay in the doing of the best work possible, in making it reach as far as possible. The Ideal of the other was a perfect service, infinite in results because it was the service of God.

Loyalty in the one was loyalty to something he had found within his own soul and had tested in the crucible of his own brain, — loyalty to a principle he would have called it ; the other's was the enraptured, devotional loyalty of a servant to a beloved Master.

CHAPTER XXIV

WITELAW SEARCHES A TITLE

WHEN Randal Witelaw descended the hospital stairs in company with Reggie Gilbreed that Sunday night, he seemed in more than his usual spirits, or at least more than usually talkative.

Reggie, who was in anything rather than good spirits, and exceedingly anxious to get to bed, excused himself and departed when he found the lawyer bent on a parting chat with the hospital Superintendent in whom he appeared to have conceived an absorbing interest. This official, a dried-up little man in a gray suit and faded pink necktie which gave him something the appearance of a pressed flower, having vacated his upstairs office for the convenience of the late visitors, had taken up temporary quarters in the waiting room downstairs.

"You've really managed this case remarkably well, Stephenson," Witelaw remarked, leaning one shoulder comfortably against the jamb of the waiting-room door, while he fixed his dark eyes on the man addressed with that curious concentration often used by Witelaw to convey an impression of deep personal concern. "Your patient's condition must be greatly improved, at least outwardly, since you first laid eyes on him, if one's to judge from the pile of torn and bedraggled garments I saw being carried downstairs."

"Quite right, sir, quite right," nodded the grateful Stephenson, pushing forward a chair. "It's long since

we had a case like this, Mr. Whitelaw. Between strikes assaults is rare in Brockton, thank God!"

"And this seems so utterly lacking in motive," the lawyer went on thoughtfully, declining the proffered chair with a slight motion of the head. "Now to begin with, it wasn't robbery."

"That's just exactly what I said myself, sir," put in the delighted Superintendent. "It couldn't have been robbery, for there was his watch and money and his keys all found in his pockets. I was just looking them over so as to make out a list. We have to be particular about that, of course."

"Oh, by the way, speaking of keys," Whitelaw observed, "reminds me that he must have had the Levenson office keys somewhere. If they were on his person when he was hurt, it won't do to leave them here. They'll be wanted to-morrow morning. You might look and see."

Stephenson shuffled over to a big roll-top desk which stood at the farther end of the room under its single gas-jet.

"I was just looking the things over," he remarked absently. "I don't remember about the keys; that is about their being marked. Would you know Mr. Levenson's from the others?"

"Well, not all of them perhaps."

Stephenson looked up with a slight start from the desk chair in which he had seated himself. The lawyer's voice came directly over his shoulder. The Superintendent had been quite unaware that Whitelaw had followed him and was leaning over the back of the chair in his anxiety to answer his question.

"You see there are two bunches," the Faded Flower remarked as it handed them over.

"Just so," Whitelaw nodded. "I know these are Mr. Levenson's. That's the key of his office desk. You see, as his confidential clerk, Thallon had to have access to things of that kind, but as to these others I'm rather at

sea. There's no telling what the boy's got here, though I think I recognize this and this. No, I shall have to take them all in order to make sure. I can return any that don't belong to Mr. Leverson in the morning."

"Strictly speaking, we're responsible, you know, Mr. Whitelaw," Stephenson put in doubtfully.

"Not for Mr. Leverson's property," Whitelaw said, smiling, as he dropped the keys into his trousers pocket, "nor as far as that goes altogether for Mr. Thallon's either. Poor boy, he's left precious little property to fight over, though I've been trying to communicate with his relatives and have taken charge of his letters at Colonel Gilbreed's request. I've explained all this to Mr. Doniphan and he quite understands."

"Then you reckon he's dying?" the little man asked anxiously, the use of Doniphan's name entirely setting at rest that other anxiety indicated by his previous remark.

"Oh, I don't say that," the lawyer returned with professional caution, "but I do think he's going under within a week or two. I'm afraid even your magnificent management can hardly prevent that. Well, well! life's not so precious comfortable we need cling to it very tenaciously. It's only a question of a few years more or less in a rather tough world, Stephenson, — in a very tough world."

The Faded Flower sighed a very deep sigh in acknowledgment of this beautiful sentiment as it saw Mr. Whitelaw to the door. Stephenson had known the lawyer by sight these five and twenty years, but never until to-night had he given him the benefit of his views on life and death. In fact, if he had cudgelled his brains he could hardly have recalled any other occasion when Mr. Whitelaw had taken the slightest notice of him.

Whitelaw, for his part, as he strode out into the darkness, had already dismissed Mr. Stephenson, together with all other faded flowers, completely from his memory. His

mind was, of necessity, much occupied at the moment with several matters of business which might have been described as urgent.

It was now getting on toward midnight Sunday. Tuesday morning at ten the fate of the Levenson-Higgins Deal was to be decided, and he, Whitelaw, had considerable information still to gather inside that thirty-four hours, before he should feel himself quite competent to act as the legal adviser of the Levenson Car Company at that critical juncture. His devotion to the interests of that corporation was not diminished by its intimate connections with his own personal fortunes; the two were so entangled that he could not, had he tried, have given them any separate consideration, and it was certainly pleasant to feel that if he finally found it safe to let that gigantic combination go through, he stood to win fifty thousand dollars as a stockholder.

But fortune building was very far from being the only element, or even the dominant one, that entered into the delicate problem which had been confronting Randal Whitelaw for some time past. Had it been a mere matter of money, it is doubtful if he could quite so easily have made up his mind to do certain things which, as he strode on toward the Everett House that hot July night, had nearly taken the form of disagreeable necessities.

He had earned the reputation of being a shrewd corporation lawyer in a locality where that designation means a good deal, but he nevertheless had a code of ethics which, without reaching to very dizzy heights, had hitherto restricted his actions within certain clearly defined limits. If at that moment he had with some regret decided on going some distance beyond them, his motive was not altogether mercenary.

The inexpressible joy of pulling wires, the farther ends of which are attached to people of wide social or political

influence, can hardly ever be appreciated by any one who has not taken part in that delightful pastime. Such innocent pleasure had kept Mortimer Gilbreed in politics through some very "lean years," when he had frankly assured Whitelaw he had "actually lost money by it." But to this other brilliant professional man who at five and forty stood on the brink of a great reputation, financial and social considerations counted for much less than a deep personal interest which had some love and some hate in it.

The night's work he had laid out for himself was, in more than one sense, repulsive to him, — not at all the kind of work suitable for a gentleman; but such things have got to be done occasionally, and it is rarely possible or safe to hire some one else to do them.

Randal Whitelaw's appearance in the lobby or corridors of the Everett at any hour of the day or night was not in the least likely to attract attention. Though he roomed elsewhere, he took most of his meals at the hotel, and held intimate business and social relations with several of its permanent boarders. Since Thallon's installation as Leverson's confidential clerk, he had frequently been closeted with him in his room until long past midnight, going over books and papers connected with Leverson's personal affairs and those of the corporation.

As he entered the cheerless, sparsely furnished office or waiting room he found no one stirring, for the drowsy night clerk behind the desk and the two bell-boys, slumbering in cane-seated chairs on either side of the wide-open front door, had their alarm machinery set for the twelve-thirty down train. Whitelaw nodded pleasantly to Graham as he walked across the oilcloth-covered floor, and when he began to ascend the stairs he did so leisurely, all his movements without any suggestion of haste.

Once around the first turn, however, he moved more

rapidly, going up the other three flights to the top floor in less time than he had given to the first. Turning down a corridor dimly lighted by a single gas-jet at the farther end, he paused without the slightest hesitation before room No. 102, drew out both bunches of Thallon's keys, opened the door with one of them, and went in.

He came out again three quarters of an hour later looking rather worn and tired. The hotel bus had just arrived from the station as he made his way through the lobby, and the Everett was wide awake again. However, the Everett was not especially interested in Whitelaw's mental condition.

When he got to his own rooms three squares away and had turned on the electric light, he threw himself into his reading chair and drew a long breath. A decanter of very good sherry stood on the table beside him, and he poured himself out a glass and drank it at a draught; even *his* iron nerves had been just a trifle shaken. He only realized that now after it was all over.

But was it as yet quite over? One thing, perhaps the most disquieting of all, remained as a disagreeable possibility. It came up before him very prominently as he spread the contents of his breast pocket out on the table. There was a blue envelope marked with Leverson's name, two Thallon packages, and the mail matter collected earlier in the evening, addressed to the same person, amongst which a yellow envelope was very noticeable.

It was the only *sealed* envelope with the contents of which it might be necessary for him to make himself familiar. If it could possibly be avoided, he did not intend to break that seal. All the rest of it had been exceedingly unpleasant, but it would be still more unpleasant to do something which the law called a felony. Of course, opening other people's valises was also, strictly speaking, a felony, but that action had been so amply justified that,

if it ever came to the light of day, Whitelaw could conceive of no difficulty in explaining it to the most conscientious of district attorneys, who in this instance happened to be his personal friend. He had been engaged in recovering certain personal property belonging to an important client, and while doing so had stumbled accidentally on the evidences of a conspiracy which had for its object that client's irretrievable ruin. Without being a criminal lawyer, Whitelaw had quite enough knowledge of criminal procedure to know that simple little matters of that kind could never by any possibility get as far as a grand jury.

But when it came to this other thing, the case was different. If possible, it was to be avoided; in any case it was to be put off as long as possible.

The intense heat and stuffiness of the room, in spite of the wide-open windows, was nearly overpowering. Suddenly it occurred to him that he wanted some black coffee and a cigar. He often went without tobacco for a week at a time, but he was a drunkard in that insidious black stuff, which makes the brain work like a piece of machinery until it breaks down.

He struck a match and lighted a spirit lamp under a small brass kettle standing on the table beside him. There was a good deal of luxurious comfort about Whitelaw's bachelor apartments. This little sitting room connecting with the bedroom beyond had many of the appointments belonging to the grill room of a high-class social club.

He never once glanced at the papers on the table until he had brewed his coffee and lighted his cigar, but when he once got to work, he worked as only Randal Whitelaw could when under pressure, — like a relentless machine endowed with some diabolic intelligence more, and also less, than human. The gray light crept in at the windows, and still the machine devoured the material piled before it in those two packages, stopping every little while to take

copious notes, sometimes even making verbatim copies of those letters it regarded as sufficiently important. He must have consumed at least a pint of coffee before he finished the last letter at five o'clock in the morning.

No, not the last! The yellow envelope still lay unopened on the table, but its fate was no longer in doubt. It was the last of a long series covering a period of several years, and was in all probability more important than all the others put together. It marked a period in a long and difficult search, a very critical period, and was likely to contain the final answer to the ceaseless question which had been haunting Randal Whitelaw these last three months.

As he held the gummed edge of the envelope in the thin column of steam, he experienced nothing more complicated than a certain inward satisfaction that the days of sealing-wax were over; he was long past caring for anything but immediate results. The desire for the possession of this man's secret was at the moment the only desire of his soul.

He did nothing to hasten the process. There was no impatient pulling at the gummed edge to see if it were loose; the action of the steam was gentle but very sure.

No one watching the sharply cut regular features, as he presently finished his work, would have said that the brain back of them had been engaged in the commonplace drudgery of searching a title, even if it was a title to three million dollars' worth of stock. As he filed away his papers in exactly the same order in which he had found them, he knew it was worth a great deal more to him than even that.

He got up from the table, setting down his empty cup with a hand not quite steady. The pupils of his eyes were as unnaturally dilated as if he had been taking belladonna, his brain phenomenally active, even while it ached painfully; he was as much under the influence of a stimulant as if he had drunk the same quantity of brandy.

As it had increased his mental acuteness it had seemed to dull proportionately that moral or ethical sense which had been strong in him during the night. He did not now care a rap for what he had done except as it counted in the game. If he had no intention of doing the same kind of thing again, it was largely because it was no longer necessary. Even the element of risk in it had become less noticeable.

There was no use going to bed ; it had been broad daylight for three hours, when, after taking his plunge in cold water and redressing, he sauntered around to the Everett for breakfast. On his way in he stopped at the desk where Fulmer, the proprietor, was now officiating.

"I say, Fulmer," he remarked, as he leaned over the broad counter that held the hotel register, "you sent up a lot of mail matter to the office yesterday afternoon, and some of it was addressed to that poor young fellow who was hurt so badly at the Junction. I am afraid he will never call for it himself ; but you better keep it on the chance. Here it is, — six letters, two papers, and a postal card. That's all you sent, wasn't it ?"

Fulmer was quite sure, so sure that he wasted no time discussing it. He was much too full of the late outrage.

"Yes, you're right, quite right ; it was abominable," Whitelaw acquiesced with a touch of his most engaging humor. "Even you and I, Fulmer, can see that, and you're a publican and I'm a sinner."

Whitelaw had an appointment at his law office with Levenson at ten-thirty, but he did not hurry his breakfast on that account, nor did he even turn his steps in that direction when he left the hotel at a quarter past nine. On the contrary, he made the best of his leisurely way to the Brockton General Hospital, where he found Stephenson, and handed over such of Thallon's keys as he had no further use for.

CHAPTER XXV

A MAN AND A PRIEST

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH stood within a stone's throw of Brockton's business centre. A narrow street climbed from the main thoroughfare up a sharp ascent, until it came abruptly on the gray stone tower with its white-faced clock, barring its further progress, — there it diverged to right and left, satisfied to get around an impediment it could not overcome, — typical both of Brockton's religion and Brockton's business enterprise.

The Church building itself only dated from 1840, though its weather-stained granite and clustering ivy made it appear much older, but the parish was one of the oldest in southern Pennsylvania, having been organized as far back as 1767 by some immigrant Virginians.

Small shops and small brick residences of the poorer sort clustered below the steeply terraced churchyard, the roadway having been graded to a lower level long after the Church was built. An irregular row of ancient horse-chestnut trees shaded the quiet enclosure that occupied nearly half a square on either side of the Church, while below their spreading branches the still more ancient tombstones, streaked with white mould and covered with moss and lichen, were peacefully crumbling into dust, as the memory of the names upon them had crumbled long since.

The Church grounds extended back to a quiet residence street in the rear whereon stood the Rectory, also of gray

stone, a very picturesque old house, and, as Mrs. Faucon always added, very damp and dismal.

Mobray Doniphan tied his horse to a granite post in the street below and walked through the churchyard rather than drive round. He was not looking forward with bliss to his coming interview, but there was no help for it.

Some pressure had got to be brought to bear on Leverson to make him behave himself. Some one of Margaret Gilbreed's family with some vestige of backbone had got to be told what the situation was, and there was no use in appealing to the Colonel.

It struck Doniphan that it was rather mean in him to ask the assistance of the Church, and Faucon would probably remind him of it, but he was not asking it for himself, but for Margaret. His feeling for Cuthbert Faucon was an odd mixture of respect and pity. The man was intrinsically so strong, yet so hopelessly entangled in tradition.

"I don't wonder he's half fossilized," Doniphan grunted to himself as he traversed the narrow pebbly path, green with moss and infringed upon with grass and weeds. "When one thinks that his father and grandfather held this place before him, one only wonders he wasn't born in a cassock. They get their Churchmanship in their blood, drink in glorias in excelsis with their first nourishment; and yet there was a time when the mighty swing of modern thought nearly carried this one off his feet. Poor old Cuthbert!"

He paused in his walk to brush away one or two last year's withered leaves from a neglected grave, but the physical action did not seem to interrupt his train of thought. "And to think," he went on, resuming his leisurely walk, "that my father was his father's Senior Warden. Well! well! Abby keeps up the family traditions. I exchanged mine long ago for the light and air

of the Hill Farm. Things might have been easier if I hadn't, but it's better as it is, much better."

He found his sister in the Rectory drawing-room anything but intent on keeping up the family traditions. Perhaps she felt she had done that sufficiently in marrying Faucon. She was reading one of the elder Dumas' admirable romances, refreshing herself between chapters on Huyler's eighty-cent candy, but she got up ungrudgingly when her brother entered the room and gave him a most affectionate greeting, even offering him some of the candy.

Without having anything in common with this very much younger sister, Mobray was, in a certain restricted sense, very fond of her, especially when he did not see her too often. He was conscious that she talked a great deal without saying anything well worth hearing, but on the other hand, her loquacity had a usefulness quite its own. There were times when it might have been likened to oil poured on troubled waters. Though frequently plaintive, no one had ever heard Abby Faucon spiteful, as women with rapid tongues and no mental training to speak of are so apt to be. On the contrary, she disarmed all criticism, all rancor. In a negative sense, at least, she was an ideal parson's wife.

After she had kissed Doniphan with an enthusiasm only dampened by his refusal of the candy, she asked after the young man at the hospital. Like every one else she took it for granted *he* would know. He told her all he had to tell, and then, with great tact, brought in the name of Cuthbert in a light, easy, off-hand manner, implying nothing more serious in view than the discussion of a chess problem. Abby's presence at his coming interview would have made it worse than useless.

He was greatly aided in his deep designs by his sister's being at the moment in a state of breathless suspense over the fate of three intrepid musketeers, one of whom she

had left holding up the ceiling of a cave, while the others, thus sheltered, were quietly killing their enemies. This good-natured, plump little woman, an epitome of peacefulness, enjoyed anything like that—in fiction. She told him he would find Cuthbert in his study, hoped he, Mobray, would stop to lunch, and when assured that he could not, relapsed into unconsciousness of all commonplace things.

The study was a large, high-ceiled room, occupying the ground floor of a wing which communicated on one side with the Rectory drawing-room, and on the other with the Church vestry. "Halfway between Dumas père and the glorias," Doniphan put it to himself as he softly closed the study door behind him.

He had been familiar with the room these twenty years, and knew every subdued light, every dusky shadow of it, better in some ways that he knew its owner, though Cuthbert's influence had dominated a certain part of his own life.

The place was typical of the man who had created it. It appeared less spacious than it really was, being heavily ceiled and panelled with black oak of a design which suggested the Gothic, and was distinctly "Churchly," even the elaborately carved heavy furniture carrying out the same intention.

Directly over a wide fireplace a large wooden cross occupied the centre panel, upon it the figure of the Christ beautifully carved; a consummate work of art, but beyond that, to the occupant of the room, unquestionably the symbol of an idea. The face, which was turned, not upward toward heaven, but downward upon the world, fairly spoke with the comprehension and pity of the Nazarene.

The Rector was standing directly under the cross in front of a small wood fire, pleasant as mitigating a slight dampness which seemed inherent in the room in spite of the midsummer heat outside. He must have but just

come in from some early service, for he still retained the long black cassock buttoned closely to the throat, which made him look even taller and thinner than he really was, though it was not unbecoming to the delicate refinement of the face. Doniphan noticed it, and how it accentuated his "priestliness." He also noticed the fire, and wondered if Cuthbert's blood could by any possibility stand in as much need of warmth as his manner. It was a small injustice, but it was characteristic. The Rector's manner was anything but cold, as on recognizing his visitor he closed the book he had been reading with a slight exclamation of pleased surprise which was in itself a welcome.

"I'm afraid you bring bad news from the hospital," he began, seizing his own explanation of this early call before Doniphan could offer any. "Take a seat and tell me about it. There's hope, I trust?"

There was a perceptible pause before Doniphan answered. He was thinking of a time thirty years before, when the tie between himself and Cuthbert Faucon had been very close, though perhaps even then neither man had fully revealed to the other that which lay deepest in himself. Doniphan knew well that Faucon's intensely narrow though lofty Churchmanship was the direct outcome of the same struggle that had carried himself at three and twenty into the ranks of the free-thinkers. Both had questioned the infallibility of a Book, the one to fall back on the authority of an Organization, the other on the authority of a Conscience. The one had come out of it as intensely aristocratic as were some of his ancestors who had rallied around Church and King as representatives of God's Spiritual and Temporal Authority; the other as intensely democratic as any man could be who prided himself on belonging to a good family whose honor was just a little bit more sacred than the honor of other people.

In that "time of great upheaval" the fight had gone differently with them, and since then they had drifted farther apart. Friendship had survived the shock, but not intimacy; that close personal note had gone from their intercourse because it was no longer a safe note to strike.

And now, safe or not, Doniphan knew it had got to be struck again. Would it wipe out what there was left between them? The element of a personal duty, a personal responsibility, was again to be forced to the front, though now the thing concerned others, not himself.

The Rector was watching him curiously. He saw his difficulty, and set it down to feeling for Thallon, an impression confirmed by Doniphan's words.

"They tell me there is very little hope," the latter said, taking the chair Cuthbert moved toward him. "I was not allowed to see him, but Lindley left word to that effect."

"And you have come for me? That is kind and very thoughtful of you," the priest said with more color than usual in his voice as well as in his face. He was always on the watch for some signs of relenting in Mobray. This quickness to call for clerical aid was a hopeful sign. "I can go as well as not," he went on; "I have no service until this afternoon."

Mobray Doniphan flushed as he saw the other's mistake. It would be necessary to correct it, but he took his time about doing so, and chose his words rather carefully. He was very anxious to avoid all semblance of irritation; he knew he could irritate Cuthbert Faucon very easily.

"The kindness is on your side, not on mine," he said, smiling up at the tall figure on the hearth. "If Thallon rallies, he'll doubtless be glad to have you there; but as I said just now, they would not allow *me* to see him. He was delirious all last night."

"I am deeply pained to hear it. I shall keep myself in

readiness. Even if I am not called there, I shall hold it kind of you, Mobray, to have let me know."

The Rector's tone was full of genuine interest. When he used his visitor's Christian name, his manner became more than merely courteous. Something in Cuthbert Faucon at the moment took Doniphan's memory back again into the vanished past, but not to the detriment of his present purpose; he made that clear at once.

"You don't understand," he rejoined, waving aside the thanks. "I did not come on Thallon's account at all, but about one of your other parishioners, who, though in the best of physical health, stands in more need of your ministrations. Don't misinterpret my bringing up the subject. I don't speak with any desire to interfere with your duties, but because I have duties of my own."

The interest in the Rector's face had deepened, but there was, too, a suggestion of anxiety in it not there a moment since.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Leverson."

Cuthbert Faucon started perceptibly. He had evidently been quite unprepared for the mention of the name. He did not speak at once, but walked over to one of the low bookcases and carefully replaced his volume of Sayce on Vannic Inscriptions, which he had left till then face downward on the table. Doniphan, who had noted the book, watched the Rector grimly as he came back to his former position upon the rug. Cuthbert, throwing a look of well-bred inquiry across the table, remarked crisply:—

"My dear Doniphan, I'm all attention."

Doniphan told his long story with careful exactness, beginning as far back as the Higgins-Leverson Deal, which he now felt at liberty to speak of as it was on the eve of becoming public property, and then carrying his auditor through those subsequent developments which led up to

the matter he had in hand. The Colonel and Whitelaw, Thallon, Dupré, Louise Dupré, Meyer, Reggie, Leverson, Margaret, — he put them all before Cuthbert Faucon as if they had been so many actors on a stage, though without exaggeration and without comment.

The expression of inquiry on Faucon's face had been succeeded by another expression, — that of profound disgust. He had taken his eyes from Doniphan and was staring moodily down into the flickering flame of the hickory logs. The fire was nearly out; he stirred it gently with the toe of his boot.

"I haven't come here with any desire to shirk this thing, Cuthbert," Doniphan went on when he thought the silence had lasted long enough. "If I believed my lecturing Ashton Leverson could by any possibility result in making him decent, I should lecture him like a Dutch uncle instead of bothering you. But turn it every way I will, I cannot help thinking my mixing any further in the matter will only make it worse. Yet, if something's not done to change him very materially, I shall have to speak, if only to set myself in the right. I know Margaret. She's already told him that I've advised her to submit herself to his orders, something I never would have done, of course, had I been cognizant of this last outrage. If I leave the thing alone now, I leave him under the impression that I quite approve of him," Doniphan finished with a little snort of vexation.

"Neither our approval nor disapproval will change him by a hair," the Rector returned, his manner chilling. "To all intents and purposes Ashton Leverson is beyond human compulsion. Assuming for the sake of argument that he is as guilty as you think, he is doing nothing for which the only world he cares for will call him to account. If he had cheated at cards, that would have been a crime. That is to say, it would have injured men who cannot be

injured with impunity. This other thing injures primarily two women — one of whom is too obscure to make any outcry, the other too much of a lady. Provided he can make his wife live with him, he will continue to be received anywhere, even if this is known. If his wife refuses to live with him, he will not lack the kind of society he wants. The man is utterly lacking in what you and I would call moral perceptions. What you call conscience, my dear Mobray, is nothing in the world but habit."

If Mobray Doniphan took small interest in this sort of discussion, it was not because he lacked convictions. His brows knit slightly as he retorted: —

"For the matter of that, so is religion. He has got to be taught one as much as the other."

"You should say he *must* be taught one before he *can* be taught the other. Fall back on the natural human conscience as a guide, and when as now you need it most, you'll find it missing."

"No, no; dormant, not dead! Otherwise the case were hopeless. Can you suggest any way in which Ashton Leverson could be made to behave like a man and a gentleman without awakening some sort of conscience in him? Can you suggest any other agency through which he could be made even decent?"

"Yes, fear," Faucon responded quietly. "The fear of God!"

"My word is large enough to cover all four. We needn't split hairs over terms. Make him fear anything you like as long as he does fear something."

"If the forces at your command and mine be coequal, why have you come to me?" the Rector asked with a touch of malicious humor.

"I did not say they were, only that they were of the same nature. A faculty of rousing sleeping consciences in others may be yours rather than mine."

"Mobray, you are getting diplomatic in your old age," Cuthbert put in, smiling. "I, myself, doubt your being here because you have any great respect for my sagacity, for you do not really think I am half as clever as you are, but because I stand for something which still, even in these days, claims and holds some power. If I cannot answer you to-day with perfect confidence, the fault is yours, not mine. The society in which we live is no longer dominated by the Church — the church is tolerated by Society. It is the precious legacy of your Pagan Reformation which appeals to the individual conscience and, failing in its appeal, is helpless."

Doniphan began to grow restless. Whatever his object, he had not come to discuss the rights and wrongs of Episcopal authority. Still, he had come to ask a favor, and he wanted to be polite. He glanced at the carved figure over the mantel, wondering how that One Personified Idea could be a moving force with a man like Meyer and a man like Cuthbert Faucon. If their reading of it were as different as the difference in their lives, it must be a many-sided Idea. He took a turn or two about the room, a feeling of discouragement creeping over him.

"In other words," he remarked abruptly, "if we cannot treat men as children, we cannot treat with them at all."

The Rector crossed his thin white hands behind his back; his face very pale, the eyes earnest.

"Men *are* children," he said slowly, "with the marked difference of being bereft of the innocence and obedience of childhood. At the latter end of this much-blazoned nineteenth century, we have this man, as you call him, in a way no more civilized than the Goths and Vandals who swooped down to plunder a falling empire. When he sees a thing he wants, he seizes and holds it, provided always he has the necessary force at command. The type

is essentially heathen; it stands in the same need of Christianizing as did Alaric in the year four hundred."

Doniphan had walked over to the long French window which opened on a shady grass plot separated from the churchyard by a low iron fence and a hedge of box.

The place held memories for him,—memories of his younger years,—altogether bitter, altogether sad. He remembered walking there with Margaret Faucon when he had first come home from college. The intimacy between the two families had been very close. Cuthbert had just married his sister; a closer tie between himself and Margaret Faucon had seemed so necessary to him then, and, without vanity, so possible.

He had known of Cuthbert's ardent approval, for Cuthbert could be ardent in those days; and he believed still he could have won the girl's love if it had not been for his renunciation of the Faith, made at the time with almost brutal frankness—the kind of frankness which three and twenty thinks the necessary accompaniment of honest conviction.

Cuthbert had turned to ice when told of it. Why he had been so bitter Mobray had been quick to guess. They had not met for a year. When Doniphan returned to Brockton, Margaret had married Mortimer Gilbreed—a man whose orthodoxy was unquestioned.

Doniphan had stifled all resentment—had met them both as if he carried no scar; but it had all come back to him when Margaret's daughter had married Ashton Leverson. And that morning by the Rectory window it all came back to him again.

He roused himself sharply as the Rector finished speaking. His reverie had brought him back, quite as much as the other's words, to the point at issue. His one thought throughout all this must be for Margaret. He was perfectly cool now.

"I admit your estimate of Levenson," he said slowly, as he turned back into the room; "but why place him either among the forces opposed to the Christian Church or those belonging to it. This world, unfortunately, contains more parasites than partisans. Levenson's type belongs to all centuries and all creeds, and now, as always, has been willing to attain to outward respectability under the wing of religion, or to take shelter behind its skirts. I merely ask you now to make it clear to this particular specimen that he cannot have that shelter if he does not behave himself."

The choir had begun to practice in the Church, much to Doniphan's annoyance. He was running his long nervous fingers up and down the back of Dr. Fisher's "Grounds of Christian Belief," which lay on the table before him. The deep tones of the organ and of the lower voices came to him muffled and subdued, but every now and then a boy's soprano rang out above the accompaniment clear and shrill, with some line of the *Te Deum Laudamus*.

It thrilled through Cuthbert Faucon like a trumpet call, as his sensitive ear vibrated to the perfect harmony. He was on his own ground here. The color which had been slowly rising in his delicate face died out, leaving it pale again, the pallor of a deeply stirred feeling, though the voice was cold and measured.

"You need have no fear that I will betray my trust," he returned stiffly. "I am grateful to you for having given me this unpalatable news, none the less so that it should have come to me through others."

"What others?"

"Who, surely, but Margaret Levenson herself. She was brought up in the Church. Why is it that in the hour of her greatest need she does not turn to it, but to you? You have sneered at the confessional, but you

have constituted yourself her confessor. You have doubtless told her she needed no guide but her own sense of right, her own inward promptings; but when her inward promptings lead her to do something likely to get her name into the newspapers through midnight visits to hospitals, you substitute *your* sense of right and take her home again."

"I'm sorry you think so poorly of me as to suppose I cannot give a word of friendly counsel without assumption. You can hardly blame me that you left the hospital before she got there. Even that is not an excuse for dragging Margaret's name into this discussion."

"She is a rather important part of the problem. When I take my stand with Ashton Leverson, it will be with its effect on Margaret staring me in the face. My influence over her will be a matter of some importance then. How much it amounts to, you know better than I do. Against my wishes and advice you have given the girl a man's education, or, rather, a man's reading, for she retains a woman's reasoning powers and a child's impulsiveness. The time was when she turned to me for spiritual guidance. Now she requires nothing of the kind. The last time she was here she elucidated Clement of Alexandria's views on Deity with great cleverness, yet she seems to be woefully lacking in the kind of cleverness which might make her home more attractive to Leverson."

Doniphan's lips were not smiling now. He leaned forward across the table; the hand that rested on its polished surface shook even under his light weight. The look he gave the priest might have scorched him.

"You! You of all men to sneer at her!" he cried hoarsely. "You, who allowed her father to sell her to Leverson!"

"What do you mean?" the other man demanded, white as death.

"You don't know at the time of the marriage Gilbreed owed Leverson fifty thousand dollars — lost in speculation?"

"I did not know it." Cuthbert's voice was strained beyond recognition.

"Well, you know it now. A man who will sell his political honor to the highest bidder will sell that of his relatives when hard enough pressed. It is well you should know Leverson as the purchaser before you defend him," Doniphan said with a sneer. He snatched up his hat from the table, sorry from the bottom of his heart that he had ever come.

Cuthbert had recovered himself instantly; had wrapped himself in his old manner as if it were a garment proof against anything Doniphan could say.

"I have not defended him," he returned quietly. "On the contrary, I have condemned him, perhaps too hastily. If you have no more to substantiate this last charge than the former, we may both turn out to have drawn too many conclusions. Its foundation, as I understand it, is the word of a street Preacher whom you and my hopeful young nephew appear to have taken into your confidence upon this delicate family matter. It is much the same with your assumption of Leverson's relationship to the Church. You have miscomprehended that completely. His connection consists solely in renting a pew in St. Stephen's, which he occupies personally once or twice a year. He is not a communicant, nor would he be received as such without giving some assurance of a better disposition than I have ever observed in him. But *your* relations with him seem even more unfortunate. You see him on the point of a transaction little better than fraudulent, though it may be legal enough. What do you do? Decline, of course, to go into it yourself, but beyond that you merely wash your hands of him. Your keen sense of honor as a Director of

the Company prevents you saying anything about it, even to me, until it is on the point of consummation, and then you casually inform me that my niece's husband is a stock sharper and a libertine — that Margaret herself has hardly enough discretion to keep within conventional bounds under the circumstances, and then ask me what I am going to do about it."

The boy soprano sang on relentlessly. The music appeared to soothe Cuthbert. To Doniphan it seemed saturated with a horrible mockery. A flame shot up from the dying fire, lighting the face on the cross above their heads. Under the play of the light the lips seemed to move as the boy sang for the twentieth time: —

"The Father of an Infinite Majesty."

The light in Doniphan's eyes still smouldered, though his voice was merely scornful as he said: —

"If you don't enjoy sharing in the responsibility, I don't much blame you. If you try conclusions with Leverson, whose crime has no defenders, and break with him, then you have the Colonel and then Whitelaw. Their respectable greed may bring as much misery into the world as Leverson's brutality, but it cannot be attacked with the same impunity. As Emerson says, 'These are not men, but hungers, thirsts, fevers, and appetites walking.' You have reproached me that my gospel has not torn the covering off such rottenness, but has yours? You claim Divine Light, Divine Guidance; but has the so-called Christian Church followed or led in the great moral struggles of a century? Has she not preached blind obedience to tyranny and superstition as often as she has preached patriotism? Has she not spoken for slavery south of a certain line and liberty north of it? Will she to-day turn her back on her own members, the men who are juggling with honesty, or will she try to settle an

industrial problem by establishing soup kitchens, and telling the restless millions to rest content with their wages and harm no man? No, my friend, it is not I who am unfaithful. I did not kill your religion. I found it dead and have tried to raise up something to take its place; for if you be the salt of the earth, you have certainly lost your savor. The final decision of the Church may be right, but will it be hers?"

"Yes, everlastingly yes!" the other retorted. "Even now, in the midst of your abuse of her, you owe her everything. You, Mobray Doniphan, stand to-day as much a product of eighteen Christian centuries as I do. You call down Heaven to witness your good intentions, but where, such as they are, did you get them? Not from your heathen ancestors. Now, as always, you, and men like you, assure the world it no longer needs a Church, and then when your own boasted system of moral law breaks down in hopeless ruin, you come to her, not in penitence and self-abasement, but with the complete assurance of your time and class, and tell me you ask my aid as a man, because you cannot in decency ask my aid as a priest."

"It's an error I am not likely to commit again," Doniphan sneered. "Perhaps you'll forgive me, Cuthbert, if at times I've thought I observed something in you almost human. But it's a mistake. The cassock never covered anything human yet, and never will. It's the old, old answer to the old, old question. As I haven't educated the girl in your own way, *you* won't save her. Not having developed into the kind of woman who can lead a life she considers useless and wicked with a smiling face, clutching her prayer-book in her poor weak hand as her sole stay and comfort, she must be abandoned as hopeless. Now don't affect to misunderstand me, I am not sneering at the kind of woman her mother was before her—the kind of woman you want her to be. Looking back on the

long years when that other woman ate her heart out without a murmur, I can revere her saintliness without wishing the daughter to follow in her footsteps. She shan't if I can help it."

He had spoken with increasing bitterness, his voice low, but piercing. Cuthbert Faucon had hardly grasped the menace of the last words before Doniphan had flung open the long window and had gone, letting in a draught of the clear summer air from the outside world.

He sprang after him, passing hastily around a buttress of the Church, calling "Mobray! Mobray!" but the man had disappeared as completely from his sight as he believed he had from his life.

When he got back to his study, the fire had gone out. The cross above it was in deep shadow, but he could see the outlines of the figure as he gazed up at it.

There had been a time when that cross had stood between him and chaos, and he was only giving back to it the best he had to give,—an undivided loyalty innocent of any compromise. In what he believed to be its service he had sacrificed his own love for the other man without a moment's thought, as he had sacrificed it thirty years before.

And yet,—if the Ivory Figure had suddenly waked to life, would it have harmonized with his preconception? And if not, would even this sincere Disciple have known his Master?

CHAPTER XXVI

WHITELAW IS PUT IN HIS PROPER PLACE AND MAKES THE MOST OF IT

WHEN Randal Whitelaw reached his office that morning, he found Mrs. Levenson, to his unutterable astonishment, seated by the open window of his private room evidently waiting for him.

"Excuse my abruptness. They did not tell me you were here," he said, as he held out his hand with a touch of embarrassment.

"I came here at Mr. Levenson's request," she returned without noticing his manner. "He wished me to consult with you about Jane Kirk."

"What about Jane?" he asked, seating himself in his leathern office chair. "Not worse, I hope?"

"Very much worse. There was an incident this morning which Mr. Levenson thinks makes it imperative for him to take some action. I spoke to him about it before he left the house, and he asked me to see you. There would be legal steps necessary if she were put under restraint, would there not?"

"Yes, but that would not be difficult. Knowing the case as I do, I should say not at all difficult. What surprises me is that Levenson himself should consent to it. He has always pooh-poohed anything of that kind, though I told him six months ago it would be advisable. I'm not an alarmist, as you know, but she has struck me at times as rather dangerous."

"Mr. Leverson thinks so now, at any rate, dangerous for Miss Laurie, that is; the woman appears to have taken a violent dislike to her."

"Has Miss Laurie been consulted about this?"

"Yes, and opposes it very strongly. Without agreeing with her, I can quite understand why. Jane Kirk has been in the family for years; her association with her has been very close. It is supposed her affliction came upon her through grief at the elder Mr. Leverson's death."

"Yes, I know that. This old Scotch woman was something more than upper servant in John Leverson's time. Originally Ashton's nurse, she stayed on years after he grew up, very much respected, very much in the confidence of Miss Laurie."

Whitelaw spoke rather carefully. To-day for the first time in his knowledge of her, Margaret baffled him. There was a subtle change in her manner that puzzled and rather annoyed him. In spite of her expressed sympathy for Miss Laurie, she had put the case in a hard impersonal way which reminded him of Mildred.

"What was the incident this morning?" he asked.

She gave him a detailed account of what had occurred, and he listened to it with professional attention.

"There would be no trouble in getting the two certificates from Lindley and Smalls," he said thoughtfully, when she had finished. "But it seems to me I had better see Miss Laurie first. I think that is only courteous, under the circumstances, and besides there are one or two things I should like to be certain of before I put two doctors on the case. As Leverson is not here this morning and it is imperative I should see him before the meeting to-morrow, I may run out to Elmhurst to-night."

"Oh, that was another thing he asked me to speak to you about. He'll not be able to be at the meeting to-morrow; he's gone yachting."

Whitelaw leaned forward and picked up a scrap of paper which had dropped on the floor. When he again looked at Margaret, his face was as inscrutable as ever; a moment before it had been very readable.

"Does Mr. Leverson understand," he began slowly, "that this is a Stockholders' Special Meeting which can hardly, under the circumstances, be adjourned?"

Margaret was perfectly cool, Leverson himself could not have been more indifferent to circumstances.

"Oh, yes, he quite understands," she said, smiling. "He does not wish it adjourned. He said that your own stock and Colonel Gilbreed's represents a clear majority if his is not voted. Otherwise he could have sent a — a —"

"Proxy," suggested Whitelaw, amused in spite of himself.

Margaret looked relieved. "I believe that was it, but as he didn't send it, it doesn't so much matter what it was, does it? I understood him to say that you knew exactly what to do."

"I suppose we ought to feel flattered."

He was watching her closely as she talked, his mind on many things. Why this move on Leverson's part? Was it to avoid going personally on the record in this critical step? If so, then Leverson too had had his doubts. How much of them did Margaret Leverson share? Could her interest in the man at the hospital have come from this? Was it possible that he, Whitelaw, had entirely misread her?

"Of course Mr. Leverson is pleased at the idea of the sale," Margaret was saying. "He is so very glad to get away from Brockton, and for the matter of that, so am I."

That sense of amusement came back to Whitelaw as he watched her say this. Her acting was, after all, not well sustained, though very likely in a sense she had spoken the exact truth. For a moment she had deceived him,

but this last touch was entirely overdone. He pushed the test a little farther.

"Brockton *is* rather dismal," he assented gravely, "though I dare say my views are jaundiced. I was up late last night at the hospital. Of course you know why. They tell me this morning young Thallon's dying. Bright boy, too. I'm right sorry."

Those long, nervous fingers of the girl's tightened suddenly upon the arms of the chair which faced him across the table; every particle of color had fled from her face.

"Magnificent weather for yachting," Whitelaw remarked casually after a pause.

She rose to go, conscious that she had not done well; conscious that those keen eyes of his had read her as if she had been an open book. She had never altogether liked or trusted him, though she had always reproached herself for not doing so; his loyalty to Ashton had been so obvious. But to-day she was doubtful even of that, though why she could not have told. There was something about him which made her cling to the part she had assumed, even after it had ceased to be any disguise.

"Yes, isn't it," she said, glancing out of the window at the dome of perfect blue which showed above the tops of the opposite buildings. "Wind west, and no smoke to speak of, even in Brockton. I should have gone myself on the yacht, but Mr. Leverson's return is rather uncertain, and of course, I'm rushed getting ready for Newport. When one doesn't expect to return, the breaking up is so much more trying; I mean," she added, hastily correcting herself, "there is so much more to be done."

Whitelaw rose of necessity, as she had risen, but he made no move to open the door, as if he still had something left to say. That curious expression in his eyes still held her there, more or less against her will.

"Why do you try to play a part with me?" His voice

was cold, ironical, as his voice often was, yet it suggested the repression of something deeper, more passionate, struggling for mastery beneath it, as he went on. "I have known you very nearly all your life, better sometimes than you have known yourself. Do you suppose I don't know you now when the crisis which I foresaw from the first has at last actually come?"

"I really fail to understand you," she said with a surprise that was genuine. "As what you have to say seems to have no connection with the business which brought me here,—the business of your employer,—and as I stand in no need personally of your advice, it is not worth while—"

"It is very well worth while," he broke in with sudden passion, "to pause an instant and look back at what has filled in the last two years, if you can once realize that the years to come are to be filled up like them. It might even have been worth while if I had stopped you on your way to the hospital last night, for I saw you go in there as I came away. Yet my doing so could only have deferred the crisis, not hindered it. The break was sure to come sooner or later, as inevitable as fate. You were in open rebellion then; to-day you are in chains again. Why?"

Her face did not lack color as he finished speaking, not of embarrassment, but of intense anger. Her look ought to have scorched him where he stood, with its unutterable contempt.

"You will certainly not find it worth your while to put a question like that to me," she said, with slow, scathing emphasis. "You strangely forget your own position and mine. You have been admitted to your employer's house upon a footing of some intimacy because you have been useful to him. Don't presume upon it; I advise you for your own sake. Mr. Levenson can change his lawyer much more easily than change his butler. His personal

comfort is much less dependent upon you than upon Morgan, believe me."

The light of battle shone for an instant in Whitelaw's face. A moment before he would have staked his brilliant career, his assured position, everything he had amassed, worked, schemed for, for the chance of one little word from this girl's lips; now he fairly hated her with the same hatred he bestowed upon the man whose protection she invoked.

"I doubt that," he retorted harshly, picking up a paper-cutter from his table and bending it backward and forward between his muscular fingers; "I make no boast in saying I've stood between Ashton Leverson and ruin more than once, for aught you know I may stand there now. Anyway, I've done things for him—that is to say for you—I would not have done for myself, and got no thanks for it. Well, well, let that pass."

He paused a moment, evidently struggling for self-control. His face looked worn and haggard. His lips were quite colorless; she noticed that now for the first time. When he spoke again, the defiance had all gone out of his face, the voice had softened wonderfully. His eyes again on hers had something almost pleading in them.

"But I make no pretence. I do not speak for his sake, far from it. I can't help speaking in protest against further disguise between *us two*. If you had had anything human in you, you would have known what I went through the day he separated us. No, don't stop me. I've led a dog's life for years, when I might have crushed him by the turn of a finger, and it has all been for you. Anyway, it has given me some rights—the right to ask some frankness at your hands. Why pretend your choice has brought you any more happiness than it has brought me?"

He paused a moment to moisten his dry lips. She

started to pass him, her anger too deep for words, but he barred her progress by a quick motion which placed him between her and the door.

"You *shall* hear me," he muttered, an answering angry light in his own eyes, "if I sell my soul for it. We're neither of us quite so young, neither of us quite so happy, neither of us quite so innocent, as in the old days before the Colonel broke up the old home here in Brockton. Yes, I know I was twenty-five years older than you were, but I was younger then than Ashton Levenson ever was or could be, if youth means love. Yes, yes, I know. Of course, it was absurd. Middle-aged men are apt to be absurd at times, but nevertheless I was right when I told myself *he* could never make you happy."

Beyond keeping his voice low pitched, Randal Whitelaw had thrown discretion to the winds. His face was working with intense passion, the more marked in one who knew so well how to keep it under careful guard; the bit of frail wood he played with between his fingers snapped like a rotten twig and he tossed it aside as she stopped his flow of words with an imperious gesture.

"I have heard more than enough; call the carriage, please," was all she said, but her full round lips were compressed to a hard straight line, and her eyes had an ominous glow in them that boded him no good, and all at once he seemed to know it.

His guard broke completely down. He put his hand to his head in a dazed way.

"What have I done? You must forgive me! I have been under a horrible strain. I did not know what I was saying. You can't part from me in anger," he put in beseechingly, though he had moved to open the door in response to a gesture of the girl's hand that he obeyed much as if he had been a child. She had taken the reins out of his hands and was in full control now. More than

that, she was perfect mistress of herself. She had something to say that required coolness to make it tell.

"I should dislike to speak to my husband about this," she said, looking him full in the face. "I know and you know very well what he would do. I hope you won't make that necessary."

She made no boast, and the knowledge that she had made none gave her keen elation in the midst of her sorrow and her wounded pride. Whatever his faults, she could count on Ashton Leverson there. He was not at all the kind of man to allow another to insult his wife with impunity; that was a privilege he reserved exclusively for himself.

As for Whitelaw, the contempt in her manner, no less than in her words, touched him like caustic on a raw wound. His mental resources felt the slur as keenly as his physical courage. But the moment of miserable weakness had passed. The very sting of her contempt roused something of that old enmity which in this man was so near akin to his tenderer feeling for Margaret Leverson. For an instant it almost came to him to throw his surplus baggage overboard and declare war.

But the time had not yet come for that. If things went badly in a certain life-and-death struggle then going on within a stone's throw of that comfortable office of his, the ripe opportunity might not come for years. He could not afford to play a losing game.

The fact that his brain could again take into account these important elements of the problem not there a moment since, showed that Randal Whitelaw was cooling rapidly. He saw now the horrible blunder he had made, had begun to see that it must be retraced, but even then it was gall and wormwood to him that she should set it down to his fear of Leverson.

"You are quite welcome to tell Ashton Leverson any-

thing you choose," he said wearily. "Nevertheless, as you have taken it so, I regret having spoken. Let the silence of years offset the hasty speech of a moment. I'll never trouble you again with my middle-aged absurdities. Only — if you ever need me — But there — I'm absurd again. It is not conceivable you would ever take anything at my hands."

She looked at him quite calmly but critically.

"No, I don't think it is," she said.

He held out his hand, as if by a sudden impulse.

"Couldn't we be friends even after this?"

For the first time in her knowledge of him she saw a suggestion of moisture in his eyes; but it left her quite unmoved. She was not at all the kind of woman to allow a sentiment to blind her to facts she considered vital. She had never fully trusted him before, when she had thought that in a certain sense he was a gentleman; she was certainly not likely to trust him now.

"Your assumption that there has ever been any friendship between us is the most absurd part of you to-day," she said with a touch of girlish amusement. "When you first came to my father's house, I was a schoolgirl of fifteen. My only real acquaintance with you has been as my husband's lawyer, and I prefer to limit it to that. I won't do anything to make you lose the place; that's all I can promise."

The color leaped to his face. His rejected hand dropped to his side, the fingers clinched.

"Very well, then," he said hoarsely; "we'll be quite cordial enemies — only remember, it's your own choice."

"I choose nothing of the kind. I don't care enough about you to regard you as an enemy. Please let that be the last word. You've already worn that subject to tatters. When am I to tell Miss Laurie you will see her about Jane Kirk?"

He dropped into his old cold manner almost with a sense of relief. No one to have seen his face as he referred to some memoranda on his table would have believed the man capable of deep emotion.

"To-night, I think," he said slowly, "if I'm not wanted at the hospital. I am keeping some track of the criminal side of the case. If Mr. Thallon should wish to make any ante-mortem statement, I might have to drop everything else and go. Miss Laurie would understand."

He was watching her again closely, but this time she bore it very well. Her calmness, oddly enough, increased his irritation. This girl was sailing serenely through very troubled waters with her eyes tight shut, but it was no longer his part to enlighten her. If he had tried, she would probably have put that down as another insult.

When he got back to his office after seeing her to her carriage, he was in no very gentle mood, but he did not allow that to interfere with his day's work. All through the long hot hours of that July day he toiled on. Only toward evening did he allow himself to contemplate his next move on the Levenson board.

Ascertaining by telephone that there was no change in the situation at the hospital, he turned his steps toward Elmhurst directly after a late supper at the Everett. The dusk had begun to gather as he approached the house, and lights were lighted inside, though there was no one in the drawing-room where he waited for Miss Laurie.

She did not keep him long waiting, which was characteristic of a woman who was never more prompt than when she had something disagreeable to do. Whitelaw rose as the rustle of her lace-trimmed tea-gown on the stairs announced her coming, and held aside the portière for her to pass. She was in her most brusque mood, and continued standing just within the threshold, as the broadest kind of a hint that she intended the interview to be short.

Whitelaw, however, did not take the hint. Without any apology he closed the door behind her, and even walked the length of the room to close the other. As he did so he glanced into the dining room to make sure it was untenanted.

All his movements were leisurely, but they seemed to annoy Miss Laurie, whose eyes had followed him wherever he went. When he once more stood in front of her, they were regarding him fixedly and with a touch of contempt.

"You really might have spared yourself all that trouble," she began with one of her small grimaces. "If Margaret has succeeded in imbuing you with some of her hysterical fears about Jane Kirk, as she appears to have done with Ashton, I should recommend the same course of treatment I suggested to him,—entire change of air and the dismissal of the irritating subject from your mind. I've no doubt he's quite cured by this time."

"I dare say; but I don't get over these things so easily," the lawyer observed, smiling. "If you've no objection, I'll take a chair and ask you to take another. I'm sorry to bother you, but I've one or two things to say that have got to be said to either Ashton Leverson or you. Now I reckon you would prefer I should not say them to him."

"Really, I don't see how it should matter to me," she returned icily. Nevertheless she sat down, as a compromise, on the ragged edge of a chair.

"Don't let us waste time in idle fencing," Whitelaw said as he reseated himself. "My being here is only incidentally connected with Mrs. Leverson. I should have come in any case within twenty-four hours. It's important you and I should understand one another about this matter. We've discussed it before, as you know, more or less in metaphor, without much result. Well, the time's gone by for that. This thing's getting serious."

"I can hardly congratulate you on your success if, as you imply, you are aiming at lucidity," Miss Laurie remarked grimly. "It strikes me your metaphors are as numerous and as mixed as ever. I don't understand at all what you mean by serious — try again."

"You will excuse me, Miss Laurie, but I think you're wrong there. I think you understand me very well. As I said before, there need be none of this thrust and parry business between us. The thing is serious, not because Jane Kirk is mad or violent, but because she has secreted some papers belonging originally to John Levenson, and supposedly addressed to Ashton, though he's not aware of the fact. Had these papers been in your keeping, say three months ago, Miss Laurie, they would not now have been in existence; but unfortunately you thought it safe at one time to leave them with her, — just before her mind gave way, — and have never been able to lay hands on them since. When I say 'unfortunately,' I mean for your peace of mind. If these more or less important documents were to fall into the wrong hands, they might create no end of trouble. I think I make my meaning clear so far. As you see, I have quite discarded metaphor."

The man spoke in a carefully guarded tone, but every word was clearly distinct to his listener, who sat within three feet of him. As he finished, he glanced across at her with one of his rare smiles. The coloring in the piece of Dresden China opposite seemed to have faded slightly within the last few minutes. Nevertheless, Miss Laurie's voice and manner were perfectly composed as she rejoined:

"You are really doing very well indeed. Pray go on."

He did, and with increasing confidence.

"After acquainting you with my possession of these facts, for the facts themselves you know too well already, I want to convince you that my interest in them is an entirely friendly one — friendly to you, that is. This is the

more important, because, though guarding this little matter carefully for the last three years, you have at times done things which if any one else had done them might have been called imprudent."

"It is nice of you to put it so considerately," the Dresden China remarked pleasantly. "Your being so polite about it almost makes me believe in your sincerity without your proving it."

"It's not necessary to go very far for that," he put in quickly, though without eagerness. "Beyond my obligations to Ashton Leverson, my own personal interests are entirely on your side. If you had only paid more attention to the business end of this affair, rather than the sentimental, as is the manner of women, you would have seen how deeply committed I am to the maintenance of things as they are. In two words Leverson's ruin means my ruin; you're quite bright enough to see that, Miss Laurie."

"And may I ask if my failing to see that is what you call my imprudence?" This from Miss Laurie with just a shade of irony in her voice.

"Well, no; though it was imprudent, it was not exactly what I had in mind when I used the word. It is always wise, when steering a difficult course, to consult occasionally with a lawyer of tried fidelity. The indiscretion I referred to, though not in itself the neglect of that precaution, was the direct outcome of it. You certainly would not have committed it if I had been in your confidence."

"I'm getting yours, at any rate, without having to pay for it," the Dresden China observed as it smoothed out its lace ruffles and settled itself more comfortably in its chair.

"I shall have my reward, my dear Miss Laurie," he returned in his most friendly tone. "I've seen you getting into deeper and deeper water ever since the advent here of a young man to whom you took, quite unexpectedly, a sudden and violent dislike. That was, if I may say so,

very imprudent of you. I had no more reason to like him than you had, but I did not concentrate all my energies in making an enemy of him. I did not move heaven and earth to get him dismissed from Leverson's service as you did in your delightfully feminine disregard of appearances. In short, I did not put myself in a position where, when he became the victim of a felonious assault, people might ask each other what I had to do with it."

Despite his scrupulous surface politeness, Whitelaw made this home thrust with a sinister disregard of his hearer's feelings which had something brutal in it. The sex had been rather hard on him within the last few hours and he could not afford to be lenient. He was not made more so by his failure to score. Miss Laurie merely raised her delicately pencilled eyebrows and remarked:—

"And is that what they say of me?"

"It is what I say to myself of you, and right or wrong, I have some reason to say it. This man Dupré was at Elmhurst two or three days before the assault. He saw only two people, Mrs. Leverson and you. There is no conceivable reason for his having done this thing unless some one inflamed his ill-balanced brain against Thallon by connecting him in some way with the disappearance of his daughter. Now, who had any possible reason for doing that?"

"How charmingly you accuse one of murder," Miss Laurie put in with a little laugh, which, however, was not entirely natural. "I almost feel as if I ought to apologize for being quite innocent of the charge."

"I am very glad you can take it so easily," Whitelaw returned, suppressing any sign of annoyance he might naturally feel at Miss Laurie's refusal to be frightened. "Your actual guilt in a matter of such gravity is the one thing which could separate our interests. Just the same, you must see that whether you instigated this thing or not,

if the man dies, you are in a much worse position than if he had lived and done his worst. I tell you this thing is serious. Your safety lies in the fact that I am the only man living in a position to put two and two together. If the world in general knew your reasons for wishing to get rid of this clerk of Leverson's as well as I know them, I should not care to stand in your shoes."

Miss Laurie glanced down at her dainty satin slippers, the toes of which, nearly covered by bows of pink ribbon, peeped from beneath her lace-edged petticoat. They did not look at all uncomfortable for her to stand in, but Whitelaw's repudiation of them seemed to require thought. The pause was not especially noticeable. The shell-like coloring had returned to her soft cheeks, but that was all. The face itself was as emotionless as that of the china shepherdess between whom and Miss Laurie there was such a strong family likeness. No one would have judged from her appearance that her next words were to be a practical surrender.

"Well, having convinced me of your importance, what are your demands?" she added. "Of course, I understand that you intend offering your valuable assistance, and that you do not offer it for nothing. You know I hate beating about the bush. What's your price? Personally, as you also know, I'm as poor as a church mouse. I suppose you expect me to draw on Ashton."

Whitelaw looked hurt.

"I am not a conspirator in a Bowery melodrama," he said haughtily, "nor am I in the habit of levying blackmail. I believe you have grossly mismanaged a delicate matter closely connected with the welfare of one of my clients. I am not going to sit still and see you ruin him, and incidentally ruin me, because your continuing to play the game appeals to you as a piece of sentimental loyalty. Leverson is in a position where he has got to be saved

from that kind of feminine devotion. But come," he went on with one of his swift changes of manner, "I don't want to belittle what you have done for him. Do you suppose I don't know that you've schemed all these years with no thought of yourself, that everything with you has been for Ashton?"

He had aimed rather better than he knew. The little thin hands went up to her throat with a quick gesture of intense pain. For an instant the room seemed to go round with her; a mist rose between those eyes usually so keen and the man who had just spoken. He had touched something long hidden beneath her hard self-reliance, her indomitable will.

"You won't desert him?" The voice was husky and strained and came from her lips like a low cry. "With all his popularity, he hasn't a real friend in the world but me."

It was Whitelaw's turn to be cautious now.

"I will be bound by no promise," he said with a slight frown. "I tell you frankly I will do nothing for his sake or yours which will compromise my own position. But this I will say; I have practical control of this thing now, but I can work to better advantage if I have your confidence. If you put your cards into my hands, I am not going to throw them down on the table, unless the other side have trumps enough to force my hand. I don't expect the worst, but you must not complain if it comes. If I come in at the eleventh hour by no invitation of yours and find you practically beaten, we must make the best of it, that's all."

"But you do make conditions?"

"Yes, two. I must know all you know without reserve, and I must have your assurance that you are guiltless of any complicity in this Dupré affair. If you have dabbled in that, however remotely, I wash my hands of you and

Leverson. What you want in that case is a criminal lawyer."

"I've already told you I know no more of Dupré than you do. You can take my word or not, as you please; I've nothing else to offer."

There was something about the way she said it that made Whitelaw believe her. The thought passed through his mind: "Then Doniphan was right. So much the better for me."

He had gained his object most completely. She had no choice but to trust him. Whether she liked it or not, he held the key to the situation. In that same low, pained voice she told him what he wanted to know of her own hard life, laid bare all its weakness, all its folly. It was an agony to her, yet it was a relief. When she had done, she leaned back in her chair wearily, but there was a sense of weight lifted from aching shoulders.

He was silent for several minutes carefully thinking it over.

"You must see now how dangerous it was keeping Jane close to you here," he said at length. "What she has hidden is certainly not on her person or you would have had it long ago. You know you can't get it out of her, yet you persist in risking this. Every moment she is here she is a constant menace. Once shut up she is harmless; she can do nothing."

"She can talk!"

"To whom? To keepers and attendants well used to the vaporings of diseased minds. Here you have not been able to prevent her talking to people much more likely to see some undercurrent of sanity in what she says. The woman Celeste already suspects. If Margaret Leverson had the same kind of a disposition, that chance meeting this morning might have been fatal."

His voice hardened as he mentioned Mrs. Leverson's

name. He began almost to feel he had wiped out the disgrace of the morning. Miss Laurie's mind, however, wandered from the subject in hand.

"But if this man dies?" she asked in a voice that was almost eager.

Whitelaw looked at her with a feeling of contempt. At the moment he felt himself on quite a different moral plain from this poor old woman who had sinned so palpably and so unsuccessfully.

"In that case we shall have very little to do. Put Jane in a place of safety, and follow out any clues we have for the recovery of the papers. You say you believe they're hidden here?"

Miss Laurie nodded. Whitelaw instinctively glanced around the room. "I must try my hand with her," he said thoughtfully. "I don't expect success, but I may as well try. May I see her now?"

Without verbal answer Miss Laurie opened the door and led the way upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE COLONEL AND WHITELAW CHANT THE REQUIEM OF A RESPECTABLE CORPORATION

"I TELL you I'm getting very tired of this."

If this remonstrance was delivered by the Colonel with more than his usual warmth, the weather may have had something to do with that. The office thermometer on its rusty nail by the window registered ninety-two degrees, even in the Board Room of the Levenson Car Company on the shady side of the street. The Colonel stopped paring his nails to glance across the table at Randal Whitelaw, who responded with more than his usual sympathy.

"So am I."

"Of course, as he's signed the final agreement and indorsed his stock, we can put the thing through," the Colonel admitted magnanimously, as he returned to his finger-tips; "but the absence of the principal party in interest doesn't look well, Whitelaw; creates gossip, don't you know, at the very moment when everything should be running on greased wheels."

Whitelaw nodded. "The same thing has occurred to me," he said.

"Here I've been up since five o'clock this morning," the Colonel went on, "and cut an important conference in Harrisburg in order to be here two hours ahead of the meeting, because I wanted to talk over the latest developments in a friendly way, before we take the final plunge

as it were, and I find Leverson gone, no one knows where. That's all the thanks I get for slaving night and day these last three months in the interests of my ungrateful son-in-law. The fact is I've made him so dead sure of his profits that he's not likely to turn up till he thinks it's time to rake them in. I'm by no means certain he won't expect us to do even that for him."

The Board Room of the Leverson Company had already some suggestion about it of the solemn occasion, which had drawn these two gentlemen together, for the day was that fifteenth of July, which, according to schedule, was to see the demise of that respectable concern. Though the Board Room table was littered with nothing more formidable than a few stock books, several bundles of papers, and a volume of "White on Corporations," there was a certain expectancy in the faces of the men on either side of it which might have been there had the Company been actually lying in state awaiting its obsequies.

It was, however, still so early that Tatlock, the office boy, occasionally flitted in and out on pretence of dusting the unoccupied chairs and tables, though he was principally interested in following the conversation. Until summarily dismissed by Whitelaw, he showed much activity with a decayed feather duster, which left a large part of its plumage behind it as the only indication that it had ever been there. In the same way Tatlock had tried to leave some of his inherent cheerfulness behind him, on his retirement to the back office, though therein he had signally failed. The atmosphere of the Board Room, at the moment, was distinctly gloomy.

"If it ever comes to raking in," Whitelaw was saying as the door closed upon the boy, "I shall be willing to do more than my share, but in the meantime, I admit I should like to see Leverson. But you were speaking of new developments; may I ask what they are?"

"Oh, nothing very important. To put my best foot foremost, as I always do, I have it on pretty good authority that Higgins is short ten thousand shares of Consolidated Car at one-forty-five."

The gloom on Whitelaw's pale and worn face did not lessen at this piece of information.

"I may be stupid," he remarked with rather dangerous politeness; "but in view of your repeated assertions that this man controls the sale of our new stock, I hardly see why we are to be congratulated on that development."

"Well, only that we ought to be able to force him to cover at one-seventy an extra thirty-five points clear profit for Leverson and — the rest of us," the Colonel put in cheerfully.

"I see; you mean his having done this turns the control of the market over to us, at least for a limited period," Whitelaw remarked thoughtfully.

The Colonel nodded. "Why, naturally. When three months ago I told Leverson that Higgins controlled the situation, I was perfectly sincere. He did. But that was before he put himself in this hole. As he took the step without consulting me, he can hardly complain if I do not especially exert myself to get him out again. Inside of three months he must have that ten thousand shares. Every share of the Consolidated is already placed, and I know the men who hold them. I've been along the line and have felt the pulse of every one of them. They stand as firm as a rock. Higgins's own allotment is a bare three thousand. To get the other seven, he has got to bid in the open market. You ought to know what that means. He can't get them from our pool under one-seventy. Some of us are inclined to stand out for more," the Colonel ended with perfect satisfaction.

"You mean *you* are," Whitelaw remarked without enthusiasm. "That's what I don't like about it. There's

always a point in matters of this kind where, in ordinary prudence, one has got to stop and be satisfied. To be brutally frank, Gilbreed, the trouble with you has always been that you never knew when to stop, and have never yet been satisfied. It's the rock on which every one of your well-laid schemes has gone to pieces until now. Two years ago you lost some fifty thousand dollars for Leverson in the same way and for the same reason. That was a matter exclusively between you two. This isn't. *My* fortune is tied up in this thing, and I mean to see it closed at the right moment, whether you are ready or not. You may be anxious to play a dangerous game with a man like Higgins, for the sake of winning an extra profit, but you can't do so without Leverson's aid, and you can't have that without I say so. He will follow my lead if it comes to a break between us, because I have made and you have lost a good deal of money for him in times past. To me your beating Higgins in this latest move would be hardly better than being beaten. On the chance of winning a beggarly profit, and Higgins's undying enmity, you risk landing us all in a common ruin. I am so impressed with this that I shall, if necessary, adjourn this meeting until I consult with Leverson. With one or two proxies I've been careful to get, I'm in absolute control."

There had been a moment or two during Whitelaw's impressive remarks when the Colonel had flushed slightly; at that reference to certain past misfortunes an expression very closely akin to enmity had settled into the lines of his thin face; but before the lawyer had finished summing up the strength of his own position, the Colonel was again smiling at him with unalloyed friendship.

"My dear Randal," he remarked pleasantly, "if you are trying to make an enemy of me, I decline the part. I may as well say that if you vote for an adjournment, I shall vote

with you. The preliminary contract has yet thirty days to run, and before then I think you will be satisfied that my judgment in this matter is not at fault. If by that time you and Levenson consider Higgins's friendship worth more than what you call a beggarly profit of some two hundred thousand dollars, I am perfectly ready to join with you in buying it at that figure; but you must remember that in order to make *his* profit he has got to depress the price below one-forty-five, and that every dollar that he makes must of necessity come out of us. I caught on to his little game the moment the stock opened wide on the Philadelphia curb at one-fifty to one-sixty-five, and dropped to one-thirty on inside selling."

It was not often that the Colonel, or any one else, succeeded in surprising Whitelaw; but he had accomplished that feat now with apparent ease. For the first time, perhaps, the lawyer realized that when threading the intricacies of stock-market manipulation he was a puling infant compared with the sharp-faced, alert man on the opposite side of the table. Whitelaw's face was transparently anxious now, and was not less haggard for being suffused with a deep color.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that the new stock is already quoted?"

"Why, of course. Has been for a week past on the Philadelphia and New York curb — 'If and when issued,' you know."

"Then why in the name of common sense didn't you cover?"

The Colonel began to look bored.

"I should think you might see several excellent reasons. To begin with, I should have broken the market, and with it my promise to you and Levenson. If Higgins's selling knocked it down twenty points, what would have been the result of my putting out sixty thousand shares? It isn't like

you, Randal, to be so beastly nervous; and now of all times when, if we only have the sense to hold on, we stand for a certain success ten times more brilliant than a few days back we'd any reason to hope for. It's precious lucky for you and Leverson that I, at least, am able to keep cool."

"There may be such a thing as keeping too cool," Whitelaw retorted, his eyes still angry; "this frigidity between us and Higgins may end in freezing us out before he's through with us."

The Colonel looked at his dissatisfied coadjutor with mild surprise. "My dear fellow," he remarked pleasantly, "you speak as if his antagonism were of my choosing, which is the opposite of the truth. He himself deliberately chose it, and having done so I fail to see how you can harmonize his interests with ours. Your trying to do so is the one thing that can bring failure to our side. You and Leverson certainly cannot complain if I fail to fulfil my promise to see you out at one-forty-five if you join forces with a man who has gone short ten thousand shares at that figure. As it stands, the situation is completely reversed from what it was ten days ago. Higgins's friendship now means our ruin; his enmity makes our position absolutely certain. The beauty of the Consolidated concern is that it's so entirely clean and above board. Not a dollar of treasury stock—nothing held back to be sprung at you unexpectedly at the last moment. Everything's paid up in money or property. But you've had copies of the articles of incorporation and the prospectus these last two months, so you know quite as much as I do."

There were things about it which Randal Whitelaw thought he knew a great deal better, but he refrained from saying so. An intense disgust with the work he had to do had surged over him as he sat there listening to the Colonel's prattle. Nevertheless he had evidently followed his argument, for he answered carefully:—

"As we are long some sixty thousand shares, it would be perfectly possible for us to make some concession to Higgins on the seven thousand he requires."

The Colonel laughed outright.

"If you make that move," he remarked, "Higgins would, of course, want fifty thousand. It would be a bald confession on our part that he had us at his mercy."

"Hardly; if we did not concede too much, and demanded some concession in return, such, for instance, as his vote and influence on the Consolidated Board. His position there is, as of course you know, out of all proportion to his holdings. I understand he's to be put at the head of the Pennsylvania plants. He may have a good deal to do with these rumored labor troubles."

"Yes, I know that," the Colonel admitted frankly. "Let's see; the new Leverson scale is usually negotiated in the spring and goes into effect in September. We didn't negotiate this year for obvious reasons. We left that to the new Company as part of its heritage. Now we're some ten per cent above the other plants, and of course they intend a uniform scale at the lower level. This snarl was bound to come in any case, but it would not have come quite so soon if it hadn't been in the Higgins interest."

"I should certainly call that disquieting enough," White-law broke in with increased impatience. "We've been banking on the certainty that we could transfer our labor contract, which has still two months to run. That would have easily covered our getting out."

"Just so; I myself shared that hope," the Colonel said with his habitual frankness. "But you mustn't put all the blame on Higgins. The local Union got wind of the matter and forced his hand. Their Governing Board were, it seems, not at all satisfied with our explanation of the postponement. Either through Doniphan, Thallon,

or McIntyre they learned what had passed at our last Directors' Meeting, and they drew their own conclusions. It has occurred to me that may have had something to do with Doniphan's and Thallon's being down at the Corners last Sunday night, though the Union had previously put in their claim that our contract with them is not transferable in its present shape, because it provides for this renewal in the spring which we've allowed to lapse. What they demand now is a renewal with us before our transfer, which would tie up the new Company at the old figures for another year, all of which places us between the devil and the deep sea."

"Our agreement with the Consolidated does not prevent our doing that," Whitelaw remarked thoughtfully.

"No; but it would not pay, because it would antagonize several other people more important than Higgins. We who are on the long side of the market can't ask the new concern to carry too heavy a load. My idea is to work the thing here before the transfer, so there'll be no hitch, no wrangle. I'm very anxious to avoid that if possible."

Whitelaw had risen and walked over to the telephone. He had not been following the Colonel's argument very closely. He was busy calling up the office of Dr. Theodore Lindley, M.D., and had just caught Mrs. Lindley at the other end of the wire, — a disappointing strike, for Mrs. Lindley, always more or less incoherent, was never more so than when conversing by telephone. Nevertheless, he managed to glean the information he wanted. The Doctor had cut his office hours to run over the hospital where Owen Thallon was reported very low. Death, the little woman assured him, was only a question of hours, perhaps minutes, at which point Mrs. Lindley became tearful and entirely beyond comprehension.

The cracked voice of the receiver seemed to be sobbing into his left ear as Whitelaw put it hastily back in its place.

For an instant it crossed his mind to call up the hospital, but why should Stephenson's report be any more reliable than the one he had already? He had got to take some chances, and time pressed. He glanced at the clock; it marked a quarter past the hour. In another fifteen minutes he must call the Meeting to order with a mind made up without shadow of turning. He walked back to his chair, the lines of his face hardening. There was the sound of approaching feet on the stairs outside.

"I shall put this thing through," he said, answering the Colonel's look of inquiry. "If it comes to a question of urgency, Slathers and Farrell must be brought up, that's all. It won't be the first time it's been done."

"And not at all expensive," the Colonel added smilingly. "Here come the outsiders. Try to look cheerful, for Heaven's sake. A minute ago your face was enough to swamp the credit of the Bank of England."

Before the Colonel had fairly finished, the hall door was swung back by Tatlock, who held it open for the entrance of three nondescript individuals, the happy or unhappy possessors of several hundred shares of the Leverison stock. To Whitelaw, who rose to greet them in a manner more or less traceable to the Colonel's late injunction, these three merely represented so many overdrafts of the Leverison income.

Judge Streeter of Harrisburg, a florid-faced, stout little party, at the moment in a profuse perspiration and very much out of breath, must have had concealed about his cherubic person some two hundred and fifty shares, the price of which had bought the *Firefly* two years before.

As the most exhausted as well as the most important member of the triumvirate, Whitelaw got the Judge into a chair, and sent Tatlock for a palm-leaf fan. Mr. Hillery, a retired grocer of Brockton and a Methodist deacon into the bargain, looked suspicious and evil-minded. Whitelaw

paid less attention to him as he only held fifty shares, which had helped furnish Leverson's stable, though, of course, Hillery was not acquainted with the fact. Wainwright, the third man, also of local residence, stood for one hundred shares which had straightened out Leverson on the books of Whitelaw & Co. up to the first of the previous May. He was a small, eager man, who had no confidence in Whitelaw, and was guaranteed to follow the Judge's lead in everything.

Still in the doorway behind these three stood the obsequious McIntyre, who had been ordered for ten-thirty sharp. As it yet lacked five minutes of it, he did not dare to come in.

"Where's Mr. Leverson?" the Judge demanded, allowing a pair of bulgy eyes to rove freely about the room as if he suspected Whitelaw of concealing the President behind one of the safes.

"Detained in town, unfortunately," the Colonel hastened to say, conscious that at anything of this kind he was much more expert than Whitelaw, who, after motioning to McIntyre to come in and shut the door, had relapsed into his usual chilliness. "Not that it matters a great deal. We've got his instructions, and of course our work's all cut out for us. The deal's to go through; Whitelaw's got a clear majority. You have our circular, I suppose?"

"Yes; and it's remarkably pretty reading, but it doesn't say what I'm to get for my stock — in cash, I mean."

The Judge's ardent following murmured its approbation of this demand. The Colonel looked amused.

"Naturally, the Leverson Company, not being a stock-broker's concern, could hardly undertake to market your stock, they merely announced the conditions of the deal, two shares for one. You got your present holdings, if I remember rightly, at about fifty. I don't mind offering

you sixty down for them. If you want me to make a hundred per cent, I'm willing."

Whitelaw, who had been watching the clock, roused himself at this point. He had a distinct objection to any further complications brought on by the Colonel's propensity to play with side issues. The fact that his offer was some fifteen points lower than the one he had made Doniphan three months before, might or might not have some significance. It might mean that he was a trifle less enthusiastic than he had been then. But Whitelaw's own purpose was merely to get this part of the business over as soon as possible. He could hardly afford to allow the Colonel to fish for pennies—besides, it struck him as distinctly contemptible under the circumstances.

"I understand that the last quotation for the Consolidated was one hundred and thirty," he remarked carelessly; "that would be two hundred and sixty for the Leverson."

"No, no, Randal, not the last," the Colonel corrected affectionately. "That was day before yesterday. I understand it closed last night at par."

"Well, then, of course I'll hold for the market," the Judge said, puffing hard.

Whitelaw called the Meeting to order at once to keep the Colonel from laughing. Even McIntyre, when he started to read the minutes of the previous Stockholders' Meeting, had to clear his throat.

The outside interests present attributed any observable hilarity to the certainty of the forthcoming profits, and, as had been intended, the subsequent proceedings went through with a rush.

The Judge asked to see nothing but the original contract, which, like the Colonel's argument, proved so flawless that he ended by being in exceedingly high spirits himself.

Even the Deacon smiled broadly; Wainwright was only too anxious to vote. That the vote when counted was found to be unanimous, goes without saying.

By eleven o'clock the thing was done. The three outsiders had handed in their certificates of stock and departed in great good-fellowship, loud in their praises of the Colonel's level-headedness and the advantages to be derived from the proper handling of securities.

After they had gone, and Whitelaw had despatched McIntyre to the office of the *Standard* with the formal announcement of the merger long awaited by an impatient public, he sat there, a little pile of the lately turned-in securities on the table before him. Whitelaw was thinking how they, together with the great Leverson holdings, were shortly to be exchanged for a bundle of beautifully engraved waste paper. In view of the news he had gleaned an hour before on the telephone, it seemed well-nigh shameful to make the trade. These crisp certificates which bore the seal of the Leverson concern had an actual intrinsic value. It was not necessary to quote *them* on the curb. Every intelligent man in Brockton *knew* what they were worth. Whitelaw caught the Colonel's eye as he looked up, and surprised an expression in it not unlike his own.

"Do you wonder that idiots like that are fleeced every day and get no sympathy — and deserve none?" he demanded with an outburst of his cynical humor.

The Colonel, however, refused to follow the lead. He would have gone to pieces years before if he had ever admitted to himself any lack of purity in his own motives.

"I fail to catch your meaning," he returned stiffly. "They are in exactly the same boat we are, and have even a better chance of reaching land. They're tied by no understanding even between themselves. *They* can get out whenever they want to."

"What a world this is!" the other man said to himself; "even Mortimer Gilbreed and I have a sense of honor left after this day's work."

"There hasn't been any hitch about the Levenson title, has there?" the Colonel asked, with apparent irrelevance.

Whitelaw started slightly.

"Why, no; I satisfied Wagstaff, their Corporation Counsel, on that some time since. He's seen a certified copy of Ashton's deed to our Company, and the necessary affidavit from Ashton as to John Levenson's dying intestate and his being next of kin. They asked for nothing more."

"I'd an idea they might fuss about its being a collateral inheritance," the Colonel nodded. "I've known lesser things than that to make trouble, Whitelaw. Now I suppose nine out of ten men in Brockton would tell you the Levensons have lived here since the town was founded, — John Levenson was so identified with the place, — yet if you take to jotting down dates, he doesn't go farther back than 1865; was, in fact, a bit of the drift left by the disbanded army at the end of the war. Odd to think of, now, isn't it?"

It was so very odd to think of that Whitelaw seemed disinclined to think of it at all.

"The Consolidated Car Company doesn't take things on faith," he remarked sententiously, "and it's not kicking."

"Which being so," the Colonel laughed, "leaves us with nothing to smooth out but this labor snarl. I'd better look into that right off, for I've got to be back in Hattisburg early this afternoon. Slathers and Farrell we can count on, as you say, for a consideration. You know the skilled machinists are more or less under Doniphan's influence and can't be approached; but there's another element which has come to the front lately — a Workman's Brotherhood, or whatever they call it, which they say's made enormous strides within the last few months. It's one of those half-religious things which are hard to fathom. It's separate from the regular Union, but they work in together more or less in harmony. Its brains and lungs seem to be in this man Meyer. Do you know anything about him?"

"Not the least thing in the world," Whitelaw replied indifferently.

"Well, I reckon I'd better see him first," the Colonel said thoughtfully. "They say his influence with his own crowd is something wonderful; and if we can swing him together with the corruptionists, we've wiped off that little bit of friction."

"He ought to be able to make them stand by their present contract, at least," Whitelaw acquiesced.

"Yes; but that isn't quite enough. I've got the other side to promise they'll accept a year at the new scale, and it will be a great deal better all round if we can force that much of a concession from the men. I should be sure of success if these labor leaders hadn't got hold of the impression that we're making something handsome out of the merger. Naturally, if they once think they can block it, they'll want to divvy with us. If we can only make them understand that our profits are secure anyway, they won't be so unreasonable. I think I'm all right with Slathers. He has reason to cultivate my friendship on some other accounts, but this other man's entirely new ground. Then after I'm through with him I must run down Leverson. Don't you suppose Margaret knows where he is?"

Whitelaw, at the moment, seemed absorbed in sorting and filing his certificates.

"I'm not in Mrs. Leverson's confidence," he observed without looking up. "The only information she chose to give *me* was that he'd gone yachting. I wish you success with your street Preacher. Wire me result by usual code when you get to Harrisburg. Good luck to you!"

The Colonel had only got as far as the hall door, when, being opened inwards with much energy by some one on the outside, it nearly knocked him over. The intruder apologized, though without unnecessary profusion. It was

Doniphan, physically much heated, but otherwise cool enough to be aggravating.

"I called to see Leverson," he remarked without preface as he glanced about the room; "where is he?"

"That's exactly what we'd like to know," Whitelaw remarked from over his papers.

"Humph! Wasn't he at the Meeting?"

"No; but you mustn't think he's gone back on the deal," the Colonel put in hastily, with a warning eye on Whitelaw. "We put that through just now with flying colors. I shall never cease to regret, Doniphan, that you're not in it."

"That's so like you," Mobray murmured. "Well, I didn't come to ask him to make my fortune for me, though I've a request to make he may not like much better. By the way, Gilbreed, if you're moving along, I'll join you for a square or two. I've something to say to you."

"Come along. I've got to stop at my office a minute," the Colonel replied genially. "Any news about that rascal Dupré?" he added as they turned to go.

"Taken this morning in Harrisburg. On his way here now."

Whitelaw rose and came toward the door with them. The mention of Dupré seemed at last to have aroused some interest in him.

"That means hanging as things have turned out," he said, with a note of inquiry under the assertion.

Doniphan paused at the head of the stairs to answer him.

"Well, we can hardly say that yet. I stopped at the hospital on my way here. Thallon's holding his own. Lindley says if he pulls through to-day, he'll get well."

As he looked back at him over his shoulder it struck Doniphan how haggard Whitelaw had grown within the last few weeks; but he had no sentiment to waste just then on anybody, least of all on him.

"I had it from Mrs. Lindley less than two hours ago

that he couldn't live through the day," the lawyer said in his level voice, yet there was something aggressive in the way he said it.

"Very likely; the report was bad, and Mrs. Lindley, as usual, a trifle emotional where her affections are concerned. The boy's a great favorite at the Lindleys'. He's rallied a bit since, and things look better."

As the other two men went downstairs, Whitelaw turned back into the Board Room of the defunct Levenson Company. He glanced at the safe where he had just now deposited those certificates. Within the last few minutes they had again lost value in his eyes. There was a certain grim humor in the situation. Perhaps, after all, they were merely exchanging cats for dogs. But it was not necessary to settle that point now. He went mechanically to work, putting away those valuable records of this day's work that lay on the long centre-table. He glanced at the minute book, where the late proceedings were so carefully recorded in McIntyre's clerkly hand; the record duly signed at the bottom in a great illegible flourish of ink by the Secretary of the Meeting, Mortimer Gilbreed, as his last official act.

But Whitelaw was overbusy just then to waste time weeping at the grave of the Levenson concern. He had established certain relationships with the Invalid of the Brockton General which had best be straightened out. There were other things to settle besides the Levenson Car Company if Thallon lived.

He rang Tatlock's bell and ordered a long envelope with the type-written address of "Mr. Owen Thallon, Everett House, Brockton," and enclosed in it the carefully resealed yellow envelope. This package he set aside with several others to be returned to the safe. He felt as he did so that he had carefully guarded against every emergency. If he died to-night, and it were found to-morrow, it would be, like many another package, handed

unopened to its owner. Thallon would understand, and would for that very reason keep his own counsel. Whitelaw's memory would be much safer in Thallon's hands than in Leverson's, and in case of his death the money did not matter. No soul-stirred evangelist was ever more conscious of the limits of this world than was the world-worn Whitelaw at that particular moment.

The rest of the original papers he packed in a small hand-bag to be taken back to the Everett that night, and then, a clean two hours behind time, he started in on the other correspondence, working through it like some irresistible machine, dictating letters faster than an overworked Stenographer could take them down, and filing documents faster than Tatlock could find their proper pigeonholes in the great filing-case which occupied one wall of the private office.

When one o'clock came he left the exhausted Tatlock and Miss Price to clear up, and went out to lunch.

Now Tatlock wanted his lunch, too; wanted it so badly that he hurried through the making up of his good-sized bundle of mail matter, his tongue so dry moistening postage-stamps that prospective visions of the flowing bowl of fellowship were a little too alluring.

He got rid of his bundle of letters at the post-office, and sped on his way to a well-known city restaurant, where the *Jeunesse Dorée* of Brockton dined daily and exchanged gossip and cigarettes.

Poor Tatlock! Little did you think during that brief half-hour when you joined in the light banter of congenial spirits that within the next four and twenty of them you would be dismissed from the service of Whitelaw & Co. for gross carelessness in handling mail. Tatlock, Tatlock! it will be your first lesson in the hard, hard fact that we are often punished in this world for other people's sins.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH A FREE-THINKER AND AN EVANGELIST STRETCH
THE COLONEL'S ELASTIC TEMPER TO THE BREAKING
POINT

"OUR friend above stairs seems to take an extraordinary interest in young Thallon," Doniphan remarked casually, as he and the Colonel turned down Main Street.

"Not nearly as much as you do," the Colonel returned with his arch smile.

"Oh, of course I mean extraordinary for him. He doesn't waste precious hours without getting paid for it as a rule."

"Nobody does," the Colonel returned with the least possible significance.

"Perhaps you're right," Doniphan ejaculated with sudden bitterness, ignoring the personal application of the remark. "The bribe need not always be in gold, but every man has his price, — some favorite idol before which you must bow the knee if you want the help of the High Priest."

"Which being so, why not take the world as you find it and bow judiciously?" the Colonel asked, laughing.

"Not yet — no; not for some time yet."

"Well, I'm not so independent," the Colonel chuckled. "I don't mind admitting I'm on my way now to see Meyer. But here we are at my office. Come in if you want to talk; one can't well discuss these things in the street."

The Colonel had paused before the door of a small

detached building, which stood on a corner of the main street opposite the Everett. Over the door a small square sign of black tin bore the inscription in gilt letters:—

M. GILBREED,

ATTORNEY AT LAW.

Still chatting pleasantly, the Colonel opened the door with a latch key and led the way in. The place was small and stuffy, but cooler than the street outside. The Colonel opened a window, shoved a chair across to Doniphan, and, unlocking a very shabby desk, began fumbling among some musty papers, without in the least interrupting his flow of conversation.

"They tell me this man Meyer is a new and rather important factor in the labor problem," he went on in his most friendly tone; "but I'd rather have had your help than all the rest of them put together. And you could have helped us, Doniphan, if you'd only chosen to," he added with something very like an appeal in his voice.

Doniphan had not taken the proffered chair, but continued standing on the farther side of a small leather-covered table, regarding the Colonel gravely.

"All Meyer and I could do for you there we've done already, though not at all on your account," he returned quite unmoved. "What influence we have has been used to make the men stand by their contract while it runs, but not to renew it at the lower figure. That's all we ever asked of them; that's all you've any right to ask. It's absurd for the Combine to insist on a uniform scale for the entire country; conditions here are peculiar and justify the difference."

"That argument sounds odd from your side," the Colonel laughed good-naturedly. "When this local Union is

swallowed up by the National Organization, which it will be shortly, you'll see if *they* object to a uniform scale."

"In other words, because we're threatened by a worse tyranny, we should put up with this one. That may be politics; but it's not ethics. I can work against sharp practice on either side of the fence. Granted that the great labor organizations are more or less corrupt, and that where they are not corrupt they are usually stupid, that only proves that they ought to be reorganized, not that they ought to be stamped out."

"And who in Heaven's name wants to stamp them out? All we ask of you, all we want of these fellows, is to leave things *in statu quo* for the next few weeks," the Colonel expostulated, falling back from the high ground he had taken an hour or so before with Whitelaw as untenable. "If they can only be persuaded to issue no ultimatum within that time, Levenson and I can pull through all right. You might help us to do that much, Doniphan. You know Levenson's whole fortune is more or less at stake. If you don't care about him personally, you might think a little of Madge."

For the life of him the Colonel could not understand the expression which flitted across Doniphan's face at this reference to the Colonel's daughter.

"I'm not at all sure," he said slowly, his sharp eyes still on the other man's face, "I'm not at all sure but that the loss of Levenson's fortune might prove anything but an unmixed evil for Margaret. At any rate, it would be a catastrophe full of ideal justice for him, not to mention several other people who have tempted him to gamble with it."

It is just possible that some of Cuthbert Faucon's words still echoed disagreeably in Doniphan's ears, and that was what made him so caustic at the moment. He was certainly doing his best to wipe out the Rector's reproach

that he had let this Levenson transaction go by him without rebuke. There was a gathering cloud on the other man's face which Doniphan completely ignored as he went on.

"The game you're playing, Gilbreed, isn't even square, played as it is on the credulity and cupidity of a public no more honest, but much less intelligent, than you are!"

"Oh, come," the Colonel put in playfully, "you know you don't care a brass farthing, Doniphan, about that long-suffering public. My experience is that the average citizen knows enough to keep his fingers out of the fire; and if he doesn't, it's not the province of free government to keep him from getting scorched."

"It's the province of decent government to suppress vice," Doniphan snorted indignantly, "and that there is vice to suppress has been proved many times already, Mortimer Gilbreed. Your being in this business amply proves it now. If watered stock cannot be sold, why is it issued? Why is it we have multi-millionnaires made in a day without themselves knowing why or how? Why is it no investment is safe except we sit and watch it with the staring eyes of a gambler? Merely because it is no longer an investment, but a lottery ticket, and marked at that. We sit by and see the contest for control, wondering which side will win, praying with all our hearts you will because you've got our property in your keeping."

"You seem to have taken precious good care I've none of *your* property in my keeping," the Colonel remarked maliciously.

"Quite right; I'm speaking merely for the deluded public, who don't know you as I do. As far as they're concerned, you hold the winning cards because they're dealt to you before the outsiders are invited to take a hand. Your only danger comes from a possible falling out among yourselves, and this is what's called nowadays — save the mark! — business enterprise."

"Now look here," Gilbreed broke in, a trifle less good-naturedly, "I really can't give the time to a discourse on the trust question. Of course, if the Combine's got a capital of twenty million, it must be wicked. My dear Doniphan, such bosh as that may be natural enough to the envy, hatred, and malice of a lower class; but if you'll excuse me, it's not quite becoming in a man of your position."

"So glad you thought of that," Doniphan retorted with a sneer; "but you needn't shift the argument on account of my envy of *you*. You know as well as I that this thing is dangerous, not because it's big, but because it's dishonest. I call it robbery, and calling it that I'm by no means certain this beautiful new concern had not far better go smash while some of its shares are held inside the family than to wait until they line the pockets of that deluded public. The family name wouldn't be much cleaner, of course; but it might be somewhat less notorious."

Mortimer Gilbreed's face, a moment before so smiling, had paled slightly, and was no longer smiling. The lower part of it was working nervously, for once beyond his control.

"Is this what you wished to say to me?" he asked, getting to his feet and closing the desk without turning to face the other man.

"It's not by any manner of means *all* I've got to say," Doniphan remarked calmly.

Mortimer Gilbreed had borne a good deal from Mobray Doniphan in times past, not because he liked him, but because their relationship was such he had not felt he could afford to quarrel with him. There is a point, however, with the most prudent of men, where natural resentment outweighs all considerations of policy. The Colonel was painfully aware that his relations with Doniphan had reached that point now. Beyond that, the other's merci-

less arraignment of his aims and purposes had left the Colonel's inordinate self-esteem quite unscathed. He had always estimated Doniphan as a meddlesome crank, whose opinions on public or private policy were the net product of intense ignorance and a desire for notoriety. His contempt for him was not in the least lessened by this latest exhibition of bad manners, but contempt for another's opinions may be quite compatible with a lively objection to being called a cheat and a scoundrel. Therefore, though he condescended to make no defence of his own position, he was very far from intending to let the other man's words go unanswered. He was quite capable of answering him while maintaining a tone of outraged dignity which suited him to a nicety as he was in the habit of falling back on it in such emergencies.

"You really must excuse me, Mobray, if I decline to listen to any more of this nonsense. It is by no means the first time you have assumed the right to lecture me, and you may as well understand once for all that I acknowledge no relationship with you that justifies it. You use the term 'family' with some vagueness. If you refer to the Faucons, I need hardly say that your sister's fortunate marriage with Cuthbert has not constituted you their natural guardian even unto the second generation, and if you mean the Leversons, I should very much like to know who has put their honor into your keeping. I've tried for some years past to keep on decent terms with you. I've done it, because in a way you've been kind to Madge, and because I'm not naturally quarrelsome. If you've seen fit at times to forget that we're both gentlemen, I haven't. I'm a much more popular man in Brockton than you are, and I've done my best to let you share in it, just as I've tried to get you to better yourself financially, though I'd every reason to know I should get no thanks for it; but when it comes to abuse, it's time to call a halt. When a

moment since, on the strength of your repeated assertions of a deep interest in my daughter, I ventured to remind you that your present course in certain matters was calculated to jeopardize her husband's interest, I had no intention of inviting your criticism either of his morals or mine. If my remark can be construed in that way, I withdraw it. I have not yet reached the pass where I need take pious counsel with the Town Atheist."

The Colonel locked his desk with a snap, and without deigning a second glance at his companion turned toward the door, as if he had said the final word. Not so Doniphan. There was something almost pitying in the look he fixed on the Colonel as he said slowly:—

"My right to indict both of you is the inherent human right to defend innocent people from the smirch of fraud and the taint of immorality. Levenson's morals will receive my attention just so long as he holds the power to drag Margaret Gilbreed's name in the mud, and you stand by and let him do it. You broke down her mother's spirit as you broke her heart, and I kept my hands off you all those years; but I give you warning now that I keep them off no longer if you let Ashton Levenson bring Louise Dupré back to Brockton as his mistress."

Mobray Doniphan saw the sneer on Gilbreed's face fade slowly. As he stood there on the other side of the small table, he seemed to sway uncertainly on his feet, as if the other man had struck him. He put up his almost womanish white hand and passed it once or twice across his forehead, as if he were trying to collect his thoughts. If Doniphan's words carried their impression slowly, their full significance was no less sure; for they tallied perfectly with some other things Mortimer Gilbreed already knew, or suspected. For once something had pierced that tough outer crust of his consummate egotism, something had shrunk at the touch of the probe, like an exposed nerve.

It seemed to his accuser as if the man grew visibly older in the few moments of the pause which followed. He turned, and leaning across the table stared into the other's eyes.

"Where did you learn this?" he demanded hoarsely. "What are your proofs?"

"Take his own word for it, if you prefer to do so. Go to him and ask him, and see if he denies it? Go to your own son and hear from him where he traced Louise Dupré three days ago. Go to Meyer and learn from him, as I did this morning, of the girl's second disappearance from the home where they placed her on the morning after Levenson left here. The yacht put into Aiken that same day, and then left without Levenson. He went on to Philadelphia. He was seen with her the morning of her second disappearance by one of Meyer's men, who knew him well by sight. You know the man as well as I do, Bent, who used to be a varnisher at the works. I went to the meeting to-day thinking Levenson might put in appearance there for form's sake, and to allay suspicion, but he hasn't even taken the trouble to do that. I'm on my way to the city now."

"Why?"

The Colonel got the one word out with some difficulty, though the first shock over, he was momentarily gaining fresh control of his nerves.

"Why? To see Levenson, of course. He either gives me his oath that he leaves that girl inside an hour, or I'll take Margaret home with me to-morrow."

"Mobray Doniphan, you're simply crazy!" the Colonel broke in, white with passion, though with a certain undercurrent of persuasion in his tone that evinced the literal sincerity of his assertion. "You are forcing yourself into my family affairs without authority and without excuse. I'm much better able to handle Levenson than you are; but

if I were not, that is purely my affair. My breaking with him at this juncture is not only impolitic, but would be the worst possible thing for Madge. If this deal be only running smoothly, I have more hold over him than any other man living; besides which, I'm my daughter's natural protector. You can't force yourself between us."

"What do you propose to do?"

"See him to-night, at latest; but I can't go until I've seen Meyer, except I can prevail on you to take my place," the Colonel added as a happy afterthought. "You could do that part of the work so much better than I. Of course it would be understood that while you were doing it, I was playing my best cards with Leverson."

The realization that even at this pass Mortimer Gilbreed was ready to make a bargain, appealed to Doniphan as a choice example of the man's unconscious humor.

"Thank you, I'm much obliged," he returned grimly; "but never having made a study of bribery, I don't feel myself fitted for the part. My impression is you won't succeed with him, though you may, for God knows he's poor enough. However, that has nothing to do with Madge, and that's what I care for most. If you're prepared to do your duty by her, I've no desire to meddle. If I have your word that you will make an honest effort to see Leverson to-night, and enter your protest against this thing, I'll keep my hands off till I hear from you, if that is within two days. Is that understood between us?"

For once helpless and speechless, though the angry light still gleamed dangerously in his fine eyes, the Colonel nodded.

Without another word Doniphan turned on his heel and walked out of the office. "I'm a fool to trust him," was his inward comment. "Faucon, with all his mulishness, is likely to do more."

* * * * *

The Colonel himself was never quite certain how long he stood there by his office table after Doniphan had left. A certain feebleness of aspect like a belated assertion of unrecorded years, which the other man had noted in him, seemed, if anything, to deepen when he found himself alone.

Judged by his own standard, the Colonel had borne the cares of life pretty well till now. Though he had made some mistakes, suffered some defeats, he had on the whole done his work pretty well, and now at fifty-two he was rounding it all out nicely with a distinct success. An honor which he had dreamed of for twenty years was his. A comfortable competence to match it (which might with absolute certainty be made more) was on the point of falling into his lap. And this moment of triumph had been selected by a malicious fate to strike a jarring note and spoil the harmony.

Not that it jeopardized his success in any way. Being sole judge of his own actions, Mortimer Gilbreed had no intention of allowing it to do that; but despite himself, it took away something of the intense gratification that had till now pervaded the charming prospect stretching out before him. Doniphan's angry words had brought back to the Colonel a certain period of his life which he was not in the habit of dwelling on. The face of his elder daughter had more than once, in the same way, conjured up the face of his dead wife, largely because he knew she had inherited, along with the regular features and the dark hair and eyes, a certain attitude of undefined tacit criticism of him, showing itself mostly in a lack of enthusiasm as to his ambitions, too near akin to condemnation to be pleasant.

All that, however, being a man not given to morbid fancies, it had been easy for him to put aside, but to-day with Doniphan it had been different. There was nothing tacit about Doniphan. He had a certain ruthless way of putting things which, whether he were cracked or not, had

got to be taken notice of, and which for a time at least left a sting behind it.

Quite naturally the Colonel's principal relief for this unexpected strain upon his nerves came to him in his righteous anger against Leverson. The brute had put himself in the wrong, and Margaret in the right, at the precise moment when it was impossible for him, Gilbreed, to break with him. Even after they had divided their profits, an open rupture would not look well. No — that had got to be avoided at all hazards. Thanks to Doniphan, if one could conceive of the formula, he knew where he could lay his hand on Leverson. Harrisburg was no longer to be thought of. He, the Colonel, must go on to Philadelphia by the next train.

The prospect of immediate action roused him from the lethargy a few minutes before clogging his brain and muscles. He closed his office with some return of his usual energy, and went across to the Everett for dinner and to telephone for a Pullman seat on the four o'clock train.

He found Judge Streeter at a small table in the dining room of the hotel, and joined him more because he dreaded to be alone than because he was in the habit of enjoying that kind of society. Still laboring under the enthusiasm of the morning, the Judge welcomed him with effusion; insisted on sharing with him a choice brand of the Everett's best whiskey, and before the meal was over, asked him in confidence if he would negotiate the sale of his (the Judge's) new stock.

The Colonel did not accept the trust until much pressed to do so; but the fact that he was being pressed was balm to his wounded spirit. It was further soothed as he walked out of the dining room, arm in arm with the Judge, and found himself the centre of a good deal of interest. In Washington, as yet, he was quite unknown; in this smaller field he was already a man of mark. Every

lounger about the lobby of the little hotel took pains to get in a word with him, with or without excuse. The Colonel was affability itself with every one of them. Here, at least, he was in his natural element; here, at least, he was appreciated.

By the time he had cut adrift from the Bench of Harrisburg and half the Bar of Brockton, it seemed to the Colonel that things were going pretty well after all. He walked down the main street humming an air, and even retained a certain amount of jauntiness when he turned into the tenement quarter which lay south of it in the direction of the river.

Though he had rarely been in that precise part of it before, he had no difficulty in finding Meyer. Some street urchins seated on the steps of the saloon below pointed out the stairway to him and added the information that "the Preacher" was just then running his Church on fast time, but that it was overdue and ought to be called off inside ten minutes. Slightly annoyed at this chance of being kept waiting, the Colonel slowly mounted the stairs, but was much relieved on reaching the top floor to find the congregation coming out.

It consisted of five or six elderly women, one of whom carried a baby, and two small boys. The Colonel squeezed himself into as small a space as possible in the hall, as they filed past. He had a disagreeable sensation that the baby's head was being rubbed up against his coat sleeve. He was wiping that portion of the garment with an immaculate pocket-handkerchief as he entered the shabby hall. A tall man, whom he remembered to have seen somewhere before, was standing by one of the front windows counting some pennies in a tin plate. It was evidently the Church contribution plate, and the collection in it consisted of ten small copper cents.

The Colonel stepped forward with his most affable smile.

"This is Mr. Meyer, is it not?" he asked in his easiest manner.

The man bowed with quiet courtesy, nothing more.

"You don't seem to have a very large congregation in the afternoon," the Colonel went on, determined to show an interest. "I was told you had the place crowded, sometimes."

"On Sundays, and in the evenings, yes; only the very old or very young can come at other times," Meyer returned gravely, his eyes not upon the Colonel's face, but on something above it.

"Yes, yes; I see," the latter returned with something that was almost apology for his ignorance. "I've heard so much about you lately, I really had to look you up. I'm Colonel Gilbreed, as I dare say you know. I've been in the legislature off and on for a good many years now, and I've always taken a great interest in the working people. Some of our best factory laws have passed through my hands, so I've proved *my* position. They don't seem to give very liberally to the Church, do they?" he ended abruptly, glancing into the plate and putting his hand in his pocket with an amused smile.

The Preacher's face darkened. "It is charity unbounded, priceless, the charity of the poor to the poor," he said slowly, regarding the copper coins in the hollow of his long, thin hand with real affection. "But they are not all as poor as this; many of the men give largely."

"Well, I'm right glad to hear it," the Colonel remarked heartily, withdrawing an empty hand. "They tell me you've done a good deal in the tenements, too; taught 'em hygiene and Lord knows what. By the way, how do you get on with the worst element? I mean the very ignorant. What do you teach 'em first?"

"I teach them to take their hats off in Church," Meyer answered absently, as if he were thinking of something else.

To save his reputation, the Colonel could not have told whether the irony were intended or not. Of course he could only ignore it verbally. Nevertheless, he uncovered his striking head in the course of the next remark, as soon, in fact, as he could do so without apparent cognizance of Meyer's unpardonable rudeness.

"I was very much troubled at hearing this morning that there was some discontent over this wages scale of the new Company," he was saying, with unshaken suavity. "I understand that you and Mr. Doniphan have been doing your best to make the men keep to their contract loyally. They ought to thank you for it. It's to their own best interest to do so."

The Preacher here turned his eyes on the speaker with instantly awakened interest.

"They will keep to the letter and spirit of it," he said quickly, "but beyond that they owe nothing to the new Company."

"No; but they should at least put off taking an antagonistic position until they have given their new employers a trial. You must remember Mr. Levenson has always been exceptionally liberal in the matter of wages."

"Not more so than was fair," Meyer returned positively.

"Well, go to some of the works in Harrisburg and Lancaster and compare for yourself," the Colonel put in with increasing energy.

"That would prove nothing," Meyer went on with quiet persistence. "What I mean is they are not paid more than they earn, nor do they earn more than enough to insure their self-respect as men. Under the same wages, or higher, Mr. Levenson's elder brother made a fortune in twenty years; can they be asked to take less now, that the younger may double it in three?"

Though the argument was a commonplace of the nineteenth century, the words were spoken with the marvellous

simplicity of one of the Galilean parables. The underlying touch of shrewdness, that insistence in it which belongs to the warm partisan, were all there, the whole wrapped in an extreme delicacy of manner which softened it beyond reproach and beyond resentment.

That part of it, however, was lost upon the Colonel, nor did he feel in the least that he had been silenced. An argument on this prolific theme is practically without limit. It would have been easy to remind the man that present conditions are not those of fifteen years before; but as he evidently knew the chief difference consisted in a large addition of watered stock, upon which it was desirable to pay dividends, it seemed hardly worth while to go into that. Therefore the Colonel branched off jauntily.

"I dare say you're right about the new Company's being mean, but that doesn't prove it's for the men's interest to quarrel with it. I know that if you work this thing right, you can at least put off any controversy for another five or six weeks. Now I'm going to be perfectly honest with you" (here the Colonel dropped his voice to a whisper as a proof of his assertion) "and tell you that it's in my personal interests that there shouldn't be a row just now. Mind, I think it's also in the interest of the men, as much if not more than mine. Now as always, Meyer, Mortimer Gilbreed's interests are the interests of the humblest laborer, now as always he stands guard over the savings of the widow and the orphan. And what do I ask of these people in return? Nothing, sir,—nothing but to safeguard their own welfare. They need tie themselves to nothing for the coming year, only keep quiet; await events. If you can get them to consent to that (the greatest kindness you could do them), I'm ready to stand back of you in all the other good you're doing. Here you are working against hopeless odds, in a hand-to-mouth fashion, when you might be simply sailing ahead. I'm not

merely speaking of myself. I could get hosts of other men of means and position interested. One of my oldest friends died the other day in Harrisburg and left two hundred thousand dollars to a Church. Mr. Doniphan's done no end for the hospital here; I could get him interested in your work as easy as not."

The Colonel by this time had forgotten all about his late unpleasantness with the gentleman last mentioned. He had always had the power of concentrating his attention on the matter in hand. Glancing at the other man's face, he felt much reassured as to its final outcome. He was already debating within himself how small a sum it was safe to mention.

"But all that need not come up now," he went on briskly. "If you and I could pool our interests as it were in this deal, I don't mind saying I could raise five or six hundred dollars within a week. I flatter myself I have some influence here. Five hundred dollars put into a neat little Church for the exclusive use of self-respecting working people would make a start — a very fine start I should say."

The Colonel was so carried away by his theme that it was on the tip of his tongue to add he would like the thing called "The Gilbreed Foundation," but he stopped himself in time. He was watching the Preacher narrowly, as the latter said thoughtfully :—

"You confuse the two classes with which I have to deal. The better class of mechanics do not need charity. What they want is justice. Their Church, when they have one, must be built by their own efforts. But there *is* a class of the very poor that is always with us. *They* need help, God knows."

No man was better fitted than the Colonel to read the expression which he thought he saw on the other man's face. He had brought the same expression to many other

faces in his time. He saw the man was tempted, — sorely tempted, — and he instantly drew the conclusion that a slight increase in figures would clinch the matter. There was nothing in the least niggardly about the Colonel.

“Of course you understand that I merely mentioned that sum in a general way,” he said warmly. “I know perfectly well that what you care for most is a general public interest which is the only thing which can make your work grow. Once aroused, there’s no telling what it might not do. Personally, I’d be willing to guarantee an even thousand inside a very few weeks. A poor fund to be placed in your hands to go where you thought it would do the most good.”

Meyer had been looking out through the open window at the busy street below. He still held the tin plate with its ten pennies, symbols of the hand-to-mouth policy the Colonel had casually mentioned. Over the buildings opposite the square tower of St. Stephen’s rose picturesquely against a clear blue sky. *He, too*, had shared that longing to raise one stone upon another to the glory of God. And the prospect of its accomplishment had seemed but a moment before so far off, so shadowy. Perhaps some premonition that his work in this world — the world that needed him so pitifully — was to be short-lived, had settled upon him within these last few weeks. If he could but leave some monument behind him more enduring than mere words, some symbol of his Pastorship, which in making men remember him in years to come would remind them first and foremost of his Cause. And it might be done, as the Colonel said, so easily. The suggested compact did not in any way jeopardize the daily bread of those he loved best. He had been preaching to them for weeks past — patience, self-control, even gentleness — a waiting policy as opposed to an aggressive, a disposition to meet their new masters halfway. All this man asked was that

he maintain that policy for a definite period; true, somewhat longer than he had intended, but not so very much longer.

He was to be paid for this not only in money, but by the interest of a class which he had as yet barely touched. There was no knowing what this newly bestowed privilege of giving might do for them. The busy street below seemed typical of a power which lay under his very hand if he would but take it. Ranged on his side, it might indeed make his mission sure. For the first time in his ten years of labor he had, within the last few minutes, doubted his success, his strength to carry it through; for the first time he had thought of that strength merely as his own.

Still watching him, the Colonel was so sure that he had won the day, that he utterly failed to understand a rapid change of expression which passed over the face like brilliant sunshine after the deep shadow of threatened storm. The man's hands had tightened their hold on the little tin plate. His lips were moving slightly as he looked almost lovingly at the ten small pieces of copper. As he again fixed his eyes on the Colonel's face, they had recovered all their brightness, the carriage of the head on the long thin neck was high again. Though the lips were smiling, there was a suggestion of contempt in them.

"I will not do it," he said with slow distinctness. "Within a week the Brotherhood and the Union will make their position clear. What influence I have will be used to make that position just and reasonable; but it will not be a weak one, and its announcement will not be delayed through me."

For the second time that day the Colonel was thoroughly exasperated, and now he was even less able than before to put some check on his perfectly natural resentment. He walked to the door before he trusted himself to speak;

but once there he turned and delivered his parting admonition.

"I suppose I ought to be obliged to you for being so perfectly straightforward," he said with a sneer, "especially as it will save me a considerable outlay. You are evidently banking on the supposition that you have unlimited power and can sell it in a higher market; but you'll find yourself woefully mistaken there. Even if you can succeed in bringing on a general labor row, which I doubt, the consequences may be considerably worse for your side than for mine. A general lockout is sometimes a good thing to meet a strike halfway, only when it comes, and your precious Brotherhood and Sisterhood are starving by the dozens, don't come snivelling to the wealthy people of Brockton and ask for alms. I've done my best to prevent the misery of such results. As usual, I've been told to mind my own business. I give you my word, I will after this. I wish you a good afternoon, Mr. Meyer, a very good afternoon."

The Preacher merely bowed gravely, and took a step forward as if to see his visitor out. In doing so, one of the copper cents slipped from his fingers and rolled to the floor. As the door slammed after the departing Colonel, the man stooped and picked it up, and stood looking at it thoughtfully. No one knew better than he did that the threat he had just heard might very easily be made good, yet he did not for a moment regret what he had done.

CHAPTER XXIX

SMILES AND TEARS

THE same morning which Doniphan had employed so profitably in making himself disliked, Margaret Levenson received one of his characteristic notes, asking her to defer her afternoon's work on "The Italiana," which, under pressure of other matter, had got to be laid aside.

This epistle of barely ten lines, confined strictly to business, and signed "Yours truly, M. Doniphan," neither disappointed nor hurt Margaret. She knew him too well for that, and, moreover, this respite from one of her regular occupations was, at the moment, rather a relief than otherwise.

That morning in the library she had let pass without comment Levenson's reference to Reggie's indebtedness to him, because, at the time, she could have expressed nothing but regret, and any further regrets for her own or her family's shortcomings had seemed, just then, not only superfluous, but puerile.

It had come to her since that there was a course open to her which, while it involved self-sacrifice, was so clearly the best thing to do that she welcomed it almost joyously.

"*She* would have wished it," the girl said to herself, as with her lips closed firmly she went down to the great silver safe built into the dining-room wall and unlocked an inner partition containing her jewellery.

Margaret had no very definite idea of the commercial value of such things, and personally she had very little

fondness for them. She did not even stop to open the case containing a diamond necklace—Leverson's wedding present. She had no more sense of personal ownership in it, nor in the other bits of brilliant stone which surrounded it, than she had in the numerous trays of silver just below it stamped with the Leverson monogram. The diamonds had been given to her for a specific purpose. She had no intention of robbing Peter to pay Peter.

But there was one shabby little case containing something unquestionably hers. It was the only thing there she was in the least fond of—the only thing she would have parted from with any real regret. She dropped this case into a small side bag she wore, closed the safe carefully, and went out across the veranda to where the pony phaeton was waiting for her on the front gravel.

As she drove through Brockton she stopped at the Lindleys' to arrange for an afternoon airing of the three infants; she was making the most of her time now. She was informed by Victoria that Mrs. Lindley was playing croquet with her next-door neighbor on the opposite side of the division fence, and almost simultaneously Mrs. Lindley herself made her appearance through a gap in it, followed by her three younger children carrying wooden balls and mallets.

"I saw you drive in and ran right over," the little woman explained rather breathlessly as she came up to the front wheel of the phaeton and held out a thin hand. "I've been playing croquet 'most all the morning with Miss Finch because, somehow, I couldn't settle to work."

Margaret looked at her narrowly and saw that she had been crying. Incongruous as it might seem, she had apparently been playing croquet and shedding tears at the same time. Margaret had known such things to happen before. It was not suggestive of a pleasant morning for Miss Finch.

"We're all so upset about it," Mrs. Lindley went on, trying to capture one of the balls from Ned who, holding his body at an acute angle (so that the under portion of his anatomy was unnecessarily exposed to view), was examining it with scientific interest as it lay on the drive, "so upset about it, Mrs. Leverson."

At the moment Ned appeared to be the only member of the Lindley family who, from a purely physical point of view, was what might have been called "upset"; but Margaret observed that Mrs. Lindley's words were fraught with deeper meaning.

"No bad news, I trust?" she asked with deepest sympathy.

"Why, surely you must have heard!" the little woman exclaimed with such genuine surprise that she relinquished the ball to Ned, thereby averting a threatened howl of protest. "The Doctor's been gone to the hospital over an hour now. The word from there early this morning was that Mr. Thallon was awful bad. I've a feeling he's going; yet it doesn't seem possible, does it? He was so young and strong and confident, as it were."

Margaret looked away across the Lindley scrap of lawn at the soft play of light and shadow under the arching elms in the street beyond. She had heard no news of Owen Thallon since Doniphan's cheerful prognostication of night before last. He had purposely refrained from making any mention of the case in his note. She could not herself understand the effect the news had upon her. Her dominant sensation was one of indignant surprise and protest. The first report had been bad, and had turned out false, — why not this?

"Do not give up hope yet," she rejoined quietly; "you have yourself said how young and strong he was. Strong, too, in more ways than one. He will make a great fight for life. I am glad to hear you speak of him as you do,"

she added thoughtfully. "He had the making of a true man in him."

"That's just it," Mrs. Lindley ejaculated, much pleased at having what she wanted to say said for her. "The Doctor called him an 'all-round pugilist'; but the way you put it sounds more respectful now he's dying. Miss Finch said this morning he was stimulating, and that was what upset me so, because I knew it was true, and because I need that kind of stimulating all the time, especially when the Doctor's away, and Victoria's fractious, and the children are carrying on. That's how I found it out. When he first came here, you could see he wasn't much used to children — had a kind of worried look when they wiped their hands on his clothes. Well, before he'd been coming here a week off and on, they minded him a good deal better than any one except the Doctor. Now, as a rule you know, you've got to be right fond of children to make 'em mind, and sometimes even then they won't."

"That's very true," Margaret said absently. She was trying to wrench her thoughts from a dying man's bedside. Her power of self-deception was nearly gone. She knew she had no hope — no belief in her own words.

"If you'd ever had children of your own, Mrs. Lever-son," Mrs. Lindley went on pensively, though her spirits were evidently rising under the influence of this confidential talk, "you'd know that though at times they're little angels, there's other times they ain't."

"The last would apply to most of us," Margaret said, welcoming Mrs. Lindley's tendency to generalize; "your children are very, very good with me," and therewith she put in her application for the afternoon, and obtained the little lady's smiling consent.

As she drove off, Margaret's own face changed slowly. The quiet sadness of it was not only deepening, but that old haunted look was creeping back into her eyes again.

Well, what if this were true? If the man's place were vacant, how long would it take for the tide of forgetfulness to close in over it? For Mrs. Lindley, with croquet applied as a restorative, not very long. With the Doctor and Mr. Doniphan somewhat longer; but with a lonely, struggling woman who had learned to watch the strong, square lines of a man's face as it softened into ready comprehension at a word from her — oh, how could she ever forget it, ever let it die out without a word or a sign!

Did she not at least deserve that? She, who had done so much to make him what he was? With a great welling up of a deeper feeling she let herself rejoice, for an instant, that she had gone to him when she had. As no one else who had known him here, she had changed the current of his life toward something nobler and better than the mere daily struggle for bread, that inevitable curse of poverty. Despite the poverty, despite the seeming hopelessness of his position, she, with her first true knowledge of him, had seen his capacity to rise above it. She had seen him expand under her first spontaneous recognition of it in him like some neglected plant under careful nursing.

And she in giving had taken something in return. If he had only lived, even if she had never seen him again, the pride she could have taken in his assured success would have gone so far toward softening her own life. Women are queer. She had only known this man three months; yet she was perfectly sure of both these things, — sure of his success, of her own absorption in it. If he had lived, she could have gone down through the years feeling that she had done that one good thing, and that the world was better for her having done it. Was it in this proud consciousness of a personal understanding, a personal influence, that lay her deep-stirred interest in Owen Thallon?

It seemed to her as she drove slowly through the quiet, sleepy streets that she had known him for years. Time is nothing in such a comprehension of one nature by another. It comes like a gift, like some subtle sixth sense, without the asking. All else is blindness beside such seeing.

At the moment something very like a wordless prayer took shape in her heart that this one thing she asked be given to her. The very depth of the emotion upon a nature naturally so self-contained, instead of exhausting, seemed rather to soothe her. Like all instinctive human supplication to the Unseen Giver, it carried its own answer. She felt stronger. The hope within her before grew luminous. It required an effort to force her mind into another channel. She must not forget the work she had set before herself that morning.

By the time she hitched her pony to the post in front of the old Burney House, Reggie and Reggie's interests had been brought to the front. She did it by sheer strength of will. Her mind was fully made up. She must forget Thallon, she must forget herself. Yes; if he would only live, she would forget.

It did not surprise her very much as she went up the front walk to hear sounds of hammering coming from the interior of the old house. Reggie was always having alterations made — alterations requiring a carpenter and several assistants. He usually lay on his back on the divan and criticised the work as it progressed.

To-day the studio door into the hall was half closed, and as the noise within made knocking a useless ceremony, Margaret pushed it open and stood on the threshold looking in.

That something very much out of the common was going on was apparent at her first glance. The once beautiful room lay before her dismantled and in dire confusion. The

heavy draperies of walls and windows lay in large rolls on the divan. On top and about them lay piled enough bric-à-brac to have filled a good-sized shop. The hooka stood on top of the bookcase, its serpent-like stem wound around the legs of the Flying Mercury, a bronze Buddha occupied the cushioned seat of Reggie's reading chair, smiling his broad metallic smile at a Barye Lion snarling at him from the window ledge opposite. Several large packing-cases stood open about the floor, upon one of which, just filled with books, Reggie himself, his back to the door, was busy nailing a cover.

He was in his shirt sleeves, and his curly hair was much dishevelled. Nevertheless, as he drove the nail home, and turned to take a comprehensive view of his handiwork, she thought she had never seen him look so well, so handsome.

The same instant he saw her, he dropped the hammer and made a dive for a corduroy coat hanging on the chair behind the Buddha. Reggie was courteous to all women, even sisters.

"Why, Madge Gilbreed! how long have you been here?" he demanded, more color in his face than his late occupation warranted.

"Long enough to be puzzled over this state of things," she answered, smiling with a little motion of her hand toward the bric-à-brac.

His use of her maiden name puzzled her; it had come from him so involuntarily, but she had more important things to inquire into just then.

"Why, you and Levenson are not the only people in Brockton who pack up occasionally," he said, laughing. "I usually go north in August, and this year I thought I'd take the things with me, that's all. Wait till I get this Indian god out of my chair. There's a seat for you, if it's not too dusty."

"Are you going to have a New York studio?" she

asked rather breathlessly. This taking time by the forelock was so unprecedented for Reggie.

The humor died out of the boy's eyes.

"Oh, I shall have a shake-down somewhere, I reckon," he said with a lame attempt at continued cheerfulness.

Instead of seating herself, Margaret had stood there watching the play of light and shade across his transparent face. She came over to him now and put her hand upon his arm.

"Reggie dear," she said simply, "I know you're in trouble, and I've come to help you."

She had taken the case from the little bag at her side when she first came in, she was so impatient to let him know how much she could do for him. She was holding it now tightly between her fingers—somehow it seemed symbolic of her mother's love, come in the nick of time to save the boy's honor and her own. She went on hurriedly, her mind intensely occupied with the importance of what she had to say.

"I learned of your debt to Ashton only yesterday. How I learned it doesn't at all matter. All that does matter is the paying it without a moment's delay. Even before, when I knew you owed others, I felt very strongly it could not go on; but lately I have said less about it, for I saw no way in which I could help you. I had saved something out of presents from Aunt Abby—but that would not more than settle your debts to the Doctor. But this other staggered me. Then it came to me all at once about the pearls,—mother's pearls,—I know they're valuable; enough, I think, to cover everything. There's nothing she would have been more anxious to do than pay this debt. It must be paid, Reggie. And there must be no more debts after this."

The boy's hatred of being lectured was swamped for the moment in the realization of what she had done for

him; beyond that any condemnation of him which her words implied must be instantly disarmed when she learned of his momentous resolution. Then, too, all she had said was so pregnant with a tenderness almost maternal in its desire to shield as well as counsel. He would have been very far from the impressionable boy he was if he had not been deeply touched by it.

He took the little morocco case and opened it with a touch for him almost reverential; for once even the glib-tongued Reggie could not trust his own voice. He took out the long chain of pearls in their old-fashioned silver mounting and looked at them thoughtfully. Knowing their value as he did, it was a surprise even to himself that they offered him no temptation. Perhaps something Thal-lon had said about hiding behind women's petticoats had left its mark upon him. No; he had had his fight over this kind of temptation and had won. Once only, last night, when he had been going over the old house, it had seemed to him that *he could not do it*.

That morning when he had come home from the Hill Farm with the entirely new impression that the Burney House did not belong to him had settled it. Before that, on the very rare occasions when Dr. Lindley had asked him for rent, and still rarer when he had paid any, it had always seemed to him more in the nature of a gift bestowed on the worthy poor than any return for his temporary use of a piece of real estate he had done so much to beautify and improve. Just because he had given it a character peculiarly his own he had grown to love the old place, and love and possession were two good things which Reggie had always considered ought to go together. He had completed the stifling of that strange impression when he had torn down the hangings and packed up the books. He had made up his mind then. He was not going to turn back now, did not even dream of doing so, as he put

the pearls into the case again and handed it back to his sister. She was regarding him with growing anxiety.

"I say, Madge, you're a dear old thing," he remarked quite dispassionately, though he had put an affectionate arm over her shoulder and was looking down into her eyes with the slightest possible trace of moisture in his own; "but you mustn't think I need to take any such desperate step as that. Why, I never could make any reference afterward to the family jewels, you know. Besides, I've resources you apparently haven't dreamed of. Didn't it ever occur to you that the small trifles now strewn rather carelessly around this room were worth something?"

Reggie waved his disengaged hand at the objects mentioned with a certain sense of spectacular enjoyment.

"Surely not that much," Margaret cried incredulously.

"They're worth nearer five than four thousand," he said grimly. "You see, in my time I've sold quite a number of canvases, and a large part of the proceeds has gone into these things, besides a fair share of what I've borrowed. Now I've made up my mind to sell out and have a fresh deal; for once in my life, I mean to earn my living."

He was quite prepared to be praised and petted, quite prepared for feminine exclamations of surprise and delight; but he was not at all prepared for what followed. She had given him one long searching look to make sure that he meant it, and then, before she realized what she was going to do, the girl had put her head down on his shoulder, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, I might have known, I might have known!" she managed to say in the midst of her struggle for self-control. "Oh, Reggie, I haven't had half enough faith in you."

A certain inherent honesty was at war with his artistic enjoyment of the situation; every atom of that superficial

growth in him revelled in her commendation. The *poseur* in him delighted in the part of the reformed egotist, which she had assigned him, and which he knew he could play so well; but his honesty gained the upper hand.

"Oh, come now, I mustn't sail under false colors, you know," he protested in some embarrassment, giving her a reassuring little pat, and then holding her off at arm's length that he might see the effect of his confession in her face. "The idea I'm trying to work out is primarily Mr. Doniphan's. I went to him and told him about the mess I was in, principally, I confess, because I thought he might offer to help me; but instead of loaning me any money he made me a free gift of a large amount of good advice. That, of course, usually ends the matter; but for the sake of variety, it just then occurred to me I couldn't do better than take it. Just the same, it wasn't altogether Mister Mobray Doniphan. Some glimmerings of the same thing had come to me before, I think something Thallon said first suggested it, if I remember rightly."

She had stood there smiling at him through eyes still moist with recent tears, very brave eyes in spite of that; but at Reggie's last reference that look of startled inquiry had leaped into them again.

"In his way he was really an extraordinary fellow," Reggie went on, lapsing into something like his old dreaminess. "Did sort of impulsive things which you or I could understand, because we're impulsive, too, though I'm free to say my inner promptings are mostly in the interests of the central ego. His weren't. Now he's gone, poor fellow, I'd like to acknowledge my debt to him as well as Mr. Doniphan. I'd like you to know that he did one splendid thing before he died."

"Then you think there is no hope?" she asked in a choking voice.

Reggie shook his head. He set down her being so much

moved to her recent breakdown. He was trying to tell her this so as to cheer her up. Reggie always had the best intentions.

"I was round there an hour or so ago; I'm afraid it's about over. Hard on me, because I'd learned to like him tremendously. Well, about this thing he did, I shouldn't tell you if he weren't practically gone. Even as it is, I'm not at liberty to mention names or be very explicit. I did not learn the main fact from him. I give you that out of justice to the memory of a splendid fellow; but my deeper understanding of it and of him came to me through his confidence. You couldn't appreciate that, Madge, for of course to you he was only one of Ashton's clerks."

Reggie paused as if to collect himself. The look in Margaret's eyes had deepened strangely, they were almost eager now.

"To begin with," Reggie went on, "you know as much of the Dupré episode as the public knows, but no more. You know the girl disappeared, but you don't know she was found and rescued by Meyer."

Margaret admitted her ignorance. The information gave her a shock of surprise and pleasure, but she could not connect it in any way with Thallon. Only once, when she had told him of Dupré's demand to see Levenson at Elmhurst, had the subject been mentioned between them. She remembered distinctly he had seemed very much annoyed, even uneasy, on learning of the incident.

"While Meyer was away," Reggie was saying, "Thallon stayed here and kept an eye on Dupré. It seems there was a man connected with the Works, an outwardly respectable, well-to-do sort of a fellow, and married, too, whom Dupré had begun to suspect as the cause of the girl's flight. Thallon must have known that such a suspicion in Dupré meant murder. Anyway, he threw himself between the two men and drew suspicion on himself. I suppose he

thought he could defend himself; but you know the penalty he paid for it."

"And where did you learn this?"

"From Dupré himself. I saw him in prison late yesterday. I've not even told Mr. Doniphan, though it upsets his theory of the Dupré affair entirely."

She had followed him with breathless interest. With the swiftness of instinct she was piecing together little things she had known of Thallon—little things that had gone to make up that estimate of him uppermost in her mind when she had spoken of him to Mrs. Lindley an hour before. How this confirmed it all! Her mind hurried on.

"And the wife?" she asked, "the wife of the man he saved: she knew?"

"Know! she'll never know! That's what made it to my mind so strong in him. So unlike myself. The man had a soul. And he didn't wear it on his shirt sleeve, either."

"Yes, that's true," she said in a low voice. "I, too, have seen it in him; but I am glad to know this as proof of it, just as I am of this proof of your own strength. You must not underestimate yourself. Whatever you have gained from others, you have taken the strong part now."

She was using her new-found sisterly pride to force herself away from revery into the active present. For a time she would talk of nothing else but his plans.

"You're sure you don't need the pearls just to bridge over in the meantime?" she asked at the end of a long talk, when she had turned to go.

Reggie waved them away grandly; he was in his element now, wrapped in his own sanguine hopes.

"No; this time I mean to do it all myself. I even see glimmerings in the future of being able to keep something besides my own head above water. Oh, Madge," the boy went on with swift abandonment of heroics for pure feeling, "what do you think my chances are with Hilda after all these years?"

Margaret repressed a smile. It was difficult to think of Reggie as a competitor with Jacob for the honors of unswerving devotion. She had a vague impression that there had been another girl within a year or two ; but that the boy was very much in love just then needed no telling. She herself was ready to give him unstinted sympathy, because she saw that the feeling was genuine, and opined that the path ahead of this true love was not strewn with roses.

"How can I judge? She is so very young," Margaret said with the calmness of her own maturity. "I can't honestly say I think you've made much impression on her as yet, but all that might come in time. But there's one thing which you seem to have ignored which to me is serious. Uncle Cuthbert has not looked on you with much favor since you refused to study for the ministry, and he is certainly not likely to be enthusiastic about any marriage between first cousins."

Reggie looked worried.

"I think I could fix up the first objection. If I could paint a St. Stephen, stone-throwing and all, on a twelve by six for the Brockton Chancel, I might bring the old man round all right," he remarked thoughtfully ; "but the other thing is, as you say, serious. Except I could get some old woman to swear I was a foundling, I couldn't straighten that out, and even then I haven't got the foundling manner. Still I hold it's the girl's opinion that's the final resort, and I can't in decency, under the circumstances, ask her what it is."

Margaret was about to reply when brisk steps on the gravel outside arrested her attention and his. Reggie stepped hastily to the door and was met by the person whose possible affections they had just been discussing. Hilda was dressed in the loveliest of morning toilets and was smiling radiantly.

"I knew Madge was here," she began, pausing in the

doorway in some bewilderment at the confusion within, "because I saw the pony tied outside."

Reggie, holding the door open for her, was regarding the dark brown curls which clustered round Hilda's ears with a lover's inane rapture. He would have given the hooka and the Buddha to have possessed three hairs of any one of them.

"I'd no idea you were moving," the girl exclaimed, turning around on the unfortunate owner of the packing-boxes. "Where in the world are you going?"

"He's going to work. Isn't it strong in him?" Margaret put in with irrepressible satisfaction, while the embarrassed Reggie was clearing a second chair.

"It indicates a laudable desire to avoid starvation," Hilda remarked judicially; "but so long as the strength's in him and not in the work, one can't well measure it. What particular labor is it to ooze out on first?" she asked, her face dimpling.

"Romeyn girl portrait, Newport, August," Reggie answered sententiously.

"But surely you're not going to take all these things on to Newport to decorate the Romeyn girl," Hilda expostulated; "it will spoil the composition."

"He's going to sell them," Margaret said with some slight stiffening of manner, "sell them and pay his debts. That's the kind of strength *I* can measure at any rate."

It seemed to her that Hilda was even more flippant than usual. She had not caught the undertone of graver import beneath the flippancy.

"Oh, Reggie, you don't mean that?" Hilda cried with sudden contrition. "You care so much for them."

"I care for some other things a good deal more," the boy said simply.

It struck Hilda that with this new simplicity he had acquired a new manliness which became him well. Perhaps, if

they had been alone, she would have taken refuge in renewed raillery from very fear that she had shown too much feeling; but she was pleasantly conscious that in Margaret's presence Reggie could hardly relapse into the sentimental and so she gave him some leeway. Nevertheless she had no intention of flattering him.

"I've always said there was no reason why you shouldn't succeed," she went on cautiously, "and of course we all want you to."

"And if I do?" he asked quickly, more meaning in his tone than she had bargained for.

For once Hilda was disconcerted. It was not conceivable that even this reckless lover would declare himself in the presence of a third person, and yet his last words suggested it. The girl's sense of what was due her was outraged at the mere thought. Even had they been alone she must have nipped this incipient movement in the bud. She cared quite enough for Reggie Gilbreed not to wish him to offer himself under circumstances which made her refusal of him imperative. Besides, it struck her as a sign of fresh weakness in him to want a promised reward before he had begun to earn it. Therefore she went on wickedly:—

"Why, if you do, of course we shall all throw up our hats and cheer; but you can hardly expect us to begin before you've covered the first lap. I should say the Romeyn portrait was the first lap. When I saw it last it wasn't half covered."

Even Reggie joined in the laugh which followed this ingenious metaphor. Hilda's humor was contagious.

"I ought not to forget why I ran you to earth," she said presently, turning toward Margaret. "Papa was at Elmhurst this morning trying to find you; he wants Cousin Ashton's address."

"I thought he knew Ashton left day before yesterday on the *Firefly*," Margaret said in some surprise.

"So he did; but he's not on her now. The *Firefly* had just got in when we reached Elmhurst. Captain Newberg told us they put Cousin Ashton ashore at Aiken yesterday morning."

Margaret colored slightly. She was more or less accustomed to learning of her husband's whereabouts from other people; but it had its annoying side. Reggie, too, for some unaccountable reason, looked worried.

"I'll drive over to the Rectory now, if Uncle Cuthbert's there," Margaret said. "If, as I suppose, Ashton went on to Philadelphia, he could be addressed at the Club."

Hilda, who had seated herself on the piano stool, playing scraps of melodious nothings as she talked, got up at once. "I'll go with you, if I may," she put in promptly. "I'd no idea the morning was so far gone, which reminds me, I met Dr. Lindley on my way over, and he told me there was a turn for the better in Mr. Thallon. I always liked him, didn't you? Isn't it glorious?"

The brother and sister exchanged glances.

Margaret forgot all about the *Firefly* and Levenson's address. Her heart had given one irrepressible bound out of pure gladness. Could this be an answer? It seemed to her that Reggie was strangely unmoved by the news, in view of what he had said about Thallon. If he still looked distraught, even anxious, she must of course set it down to Hilda's treatment of him.

Perhaps his sister was, on her side, an equal puzzle to Reggie. If within an hour she had shown him the sadder side of her brave young heart, she treated him now to an exhibition of rare spirits which even Hilda's could hardly keep pace with. She managed to make him understand before she left that she had great hopes of Hilda, though his masculine density prevented him from grasping the reason why.

Poor Reggie! After he had seen the phaeton turn the

corner, he went back rather sadly into the old house. He had, in fact, even outside his own affairs, something to worry about. He could easily see the significance of Leverson's movements. He could hardly be absent from Brockton at the present juncture without some more adequate motive than the improvement of his health. The certainty of what the motive was brought back to the boy's mind with vivid force the danger which threatened Margaret. He had said nothing to her that morning about herself. She had been so responsive to his talk of Thallon, so absorbed in his own problems, that he had forgotten everything else. It had been on his mind before to tell her that whatever came between them, she could count on his love, and he had meant to add, protection, and now he had let the opportunity pass, and had not said a word. Despite his heroics, his ego had got the better of him after all.

CHAPTER XXX

GREAT THINGS AND SMALL

MARGARET lunched that day at the Rectory and was, if that were possible, a greater puzzle to the Rector than she had ever been before. He had counted on going to Elmhurst again that afternoon to advise and counsel a woman old beyond her years, — a woman face to face with a great moral problem, — when unexpectedly he met her at his own table, to find her in brilliant spirits, her face radiant, her eyes shining, a girl in all the pride of her girlhood, a mere child, with the exuberance of a child's fancy.

Ever since that last talk with Doniphan, Cuthbert Faucon had been steeling himself to meet the issue that had become predominant in Margaret's life. He had made up his mind to act and act quickly in this matter, which repelled him as only a fastidious man can be repelled by an unclean thing; and though he was doing this of his own volition, he was also conscious of being spurred on by some lingering echo of Doniphan's words in that recent and very painful interview.

Though he regretted the part he had been forced to take, he had never for a moment doubted that the injustice rested primarily with the other man, certainly not less so since he had received a letter from him — a letter of regret for words hastily spoken, but with no recantation of principles.

Besides this, which had kept him under a nervous strain all day, his deeper feelings had been strongly stirred, when he had made up his mind to see Margaret that morning, and

yet, when he now actually sat face to face with her, her utter unconsciousness, her light mood, her rapid talk, froze him again into his habitual reserve.

Perhaps he would not have entertained much more hope of her if he had known that she was inwardly putting up little hymns of thanksgiving, one refrain, one burden, running through them all. "He will live! He will live! He will live!"

She and Hilda kept her aunt in a constant purr of contented amusement. The talk flowed easily over all Brockton's recent events, and all their comments were optimistic. Mr. Thallon was sure to get well, that was Hilda's unavoidable exaggeration. Reggie would be fairly overrun with commissions as soon as he reached New York, that was Margaret's. Margaret was convinced Hilda should come to Newport after leaving the seashore, and obtained her aunt's smiling consent. There are occasions when the burden is fitted to the back. The good woman was not in the least worried; in Hilda's absence the Rectory ménage ran itself.

And meanwhile not one word about the Leversons' permanent desertion of Brockton. There were numberless opportunities when it might have been brought in; but this girl to whom it should have meant so much, carefully steered clear of it.

The Rector, who made no effort to follow the lighter talk, consumed as he watched her furtively more mental than material sustenance. He made up his mind before the meal was over that the Gilbreed streak in Margaret was considerably more pronounced than he had supposed. He was coldly polite and at times absent-minded. There were moments when his face hardened as he looked across the table at her. Yet through it all those words of Doniphan's came back persistently, — "*You let her father sell her to Leverson.*"

If he had known as much of human nature as he knew of Hebrew, he would have known that nothing could have proclaimed the girl's innocence of thought more completely than her perfect naturalness. Seeing it as he did, in the light of what Doniphan had told him, it struck him as a mere assumption, and shallow at that. If she were trying to cover up deeper feeling, she was certainly overdoing it. He did not like her tone — a tone he had noted in her before. To the Rector's mind it made his arriving at some sort of an understanding with his niece more imperative than ever.

What he had told Doniphan about Margaret's keeping him at a distance had been the unvarnished truth. In her many serious talks with him she had never, since her marriage, brought herself or her own troubles into them, however remotely. It was not easy for a man like Cuthbert Faucon to break through other people's ice and force himself into the girl's confidence; but it was a clear duty, and he was not going to shirk it.

She had already given him all the information she had about her husband's probable location, so that, assuming he desired nothing more, she had, on rising from the table, come toward him as if to bid him good-by as he turned again toward the study.

"Come in a moment before you go," he had said, and tried to say it affectionately; "there are one or two things I want to talk over with you before you leave Brockton."

His own womankind understood at once from his tone that the purpose of the conference was pastoral, though Margaret was not so quick to see this. The sacredness of the study to pastoral confidence was well ingrained into Mrs. Faucon and Hilda; and if it had not been, neither would have had any desire to pry into it. Mrs. Faucon's large fund of curiosity was confined entirely to things of this world; while Hilda found quite enough exercise in

developing her own soul without assisting that of other people. She had none of poor Margaret's ambitions.

"I must write to Ashton to-night myself," the latter said, as the study door closed behind her. "I want to know, if possible, how much time I still have in Brockton, I have so much to do."

"I only learned yesterday from Mobray Doniphan that you and Ashton intend giving up your home here," the Rector said as he placed a chair for her and seated himself at his writing table. "It seems strange to me, Margaret, that with such a momentous change hanging over your life, you have let me learn of this through others."

She responded instantly to the reproach which lurked in his voice, despite himself. Instead of taking the proffered chair, she came around to the side of his and put an affectionate hand on his shoulder.

"I don't wonder you feel so," she returned, half smiling, half serious; "but you won't if you'll only remember that Mr. Doniphan already knew of it through his connection with the Company, and that the secret of the sale was carefully guarded for business reasons. I don't know anything of the business part of it, but if Mr. Doniphan has spoken of it, of course I may. Ashton's selling the Works seems to me not only very natural, but very right in him. You know he has never cared for the life here. I'm sure you must feel this as I do."

The Rector drew the girl down beside him, and looked at her thoughtfully. The child had sat under his preaching since she was ten years old; he had baptized her, prepared her for confirmation, married her, had thought he knew her; yet now, for the second time within an hour, he had begun to suspect her of lack of feeling. Nothing but his recollection of what Doniphan had said made him doubt it, and that thought brought him small comfort. If indeed she had any depth in her, it had been

plumbed by others—he had not been permitted to see.

It was not the tie of blood between them which made this hurt him so. He was her pastor, her parish priest, yet despite that kindly accent, that affectionate hand upon his shoulder, she was keeping him at arm's length now as she had always done. He controlled himself with an effort as he said slowly:—

“And you—you leave Brockton—you leave all the associations of your childhood, your nearest kindred, your first Church home, and, I may say it without egotism, your pastor: you leave all these without regret? You come, and in answer to my questions, not before, tell me of it, to all outward seeming radiantly happy. Oh, Margaret, Margaret, there are things about you I cannot understand!”

The radiance had all gone out of her face now. After a daily, hourly struggle to make her renunciation complete, the success which had crowned her efforts had only brought her this. Yet she could not find it in her heart to blame him; his very reproach might mean an affection in him, not the less grateful to her hungry young heart that she had never before suspected its existence. She drew closer to him. The eyes she fixed upon his face were tearless, but wistful.

“You have not understood, if you could think that of me,” she answered quietly, though he might have felt the hand upon his arm vibrate slightly. “It was just because it was so hard, because I was so uncertain of my strength, that I have not dared dwell on it. There seemed no question but that it was the right thing to do. My husband's interests seemed the only thing to consider—as if everything else should be put aside.”

It never entered her head that she could have met his with a counter reproach; that if he had done his duty by

her years before, it might have been easier for her to have turned to him now. Above all, it never occurred to her that what she was saying was in itself a reproach.

But it was, and *he* was quick to see it. He was not primarily responsible for her marriage; but he had not hindered it. Disagreeable as, in a sense, it had been to him, he had thought of it at the time as a possible means of grace for Ashton Leverson. Like Margaret herself, he had dreamed of its doing untold good; yet this was what it had come to. Instinctively he glanced toward the place in the room where Doniphan had stood when he made that angry and most unjust retort.

This moment, when he had come nearest to some touch of self-reproach, was the moment of his greatest tenderness for her. Though he was laboring under the limitation of his right to tell her what he had heard of Leverson, one thing, at least, he could say,—that if the burden became too heavy, there was only one place to turn for help and guidance.

“My dear child,” he said slowly, “the great question with me is whether in that most natural, inevitable doubt of your own strength, you have tested the strength of your faith, and have or have not found it wanting? Forgive my asking the question, my seeming doubt of your unswerving loyalty to Christ and to His Church; but if you have not turned to Him here and now, your faith is vain. Do not think I refer merely to your going away. The problem you have been called upon to face so early in life is not merely a change of residence, though that in itself may have been none too easy. It is much broader and deeper than that (I speak without reserve because it is my duty, as well as my right, as your uncle and your pastor),—your married life is not happy, Margaret; your hopes and my hopes of Ashton have not been realized.”

She started slightly at this tearing aside of the curtain

with which she had so carefully covered her inner life. Though his manner was very gentle, and it had never been so warm, so intimate, he was making her feel for the first time the claim of the Church, not only on her loyalty, but on her confidence. The hand of the ecclesiastic was gloved, but it was nevertheless a hand of iron.

And she, on her side, recognized a certain justice in the demand, though his point of view had not occurred to her before. Her inherent honesty prevented her from ascribing her past reticence toward him to delicacy of feeling, for that had not kept her from giving her full confidence to Doniphan. It was clear to her that she had turned to him at a moment of supreme trial, not merely because she had found him beside her, but because his influence over her had grown through long years to be an integral part of her life. Her confidence there had been instinctive — her confidence here must be forced. Her realization of it was the realization that she had been at fault. It never occurred to her that the fault might be Cuthbert Faucon's. She rectified it as far as it could be rectified in the only way open to her, by being perfectly honest.

"I have never spoken of this to you, Uncle Cuthbert" (her words came slowly, even painfully), "because I did not see how you could help me. I have never spoken to any one except Mr. Doniphan, and then only once, under great stress of suffering; I blamed myself afterward for having told even him. It was not loyal to Ashton, and I want to be so loyal. — After all, it is not a question of my happiness — only a question whether I can do what's right — and — and — go on — being loyal."

It was impossible to listen to the tone of the girl's voice and not be moved by it; yet she had struck a note which jarred on Cuthbert Faucon's highly strung nerves. The "having told even him" seemed to put Mobray Doniphan on a pedestal, all the more that she was quite unconscious

of it. The Rector's mortification was not at all personal. He was not jealous of his own prestige. His next words showed that—were carefully chosen for that purpose.

"Margaret," he asked, as he took her hand in his and stroked it gently, "what do you suppose the Church is for? It is not an insurance company, guaranteeing our entry into heaven in return for the acceptance of printed formulas, but a *living force* which should guide and control us through life, from cradle to grave, because it is the custodian of Divine Law. Men like Mobray Doniphan have for centuries spent their lives in trying to prove the equality of the ethical with the religious life, because, quite sincerely, they could not, or thought they could not, accept certain Christian doctrines, while, at the same time, they wanted to be good. They reduce belief to its lowest factor. A man's faith no longer matters if it be sincere as far as it goes, his purposes, his life, based on some sense of obligation to a power higher than himself—a power he does not pretend to know. They have failed in this, and must always fail, and always remain unconscious of their failure, because the man who continues satisfied with the moral can never reach the higher level to which it leads, nor even want to reach it."

Margaret's face had flushed crimson at her uncle's last reference to Doniphan. The force of his argument was utterly lost on her. The woman in her rallied to the support of a man whom she loved as she had never loved Cuthbert Faucon. She drew back, rising to her full height, looking down upon him calm-eyed from the greater distance.

"I have no means of measuring his level," she said coldly. "I only feel instinctively it is a higher plain than mine. Because he does not believe as we do, have we any right to say he does not believe as much? If I have misread the man, perhaps it is because I am not even perfectly moral."

He tried hard to be patient with her, though her words roused his greatest fear for her.

"You might well be that," he returned slowly, "and yet be far from the great Central Belief you have been taught from childhood. Saul of Tarsus was perfectly moral when he persecuted the Church, because he was doing what he thought was right, and because he had no means of knowing. When, however, the one means of knowing was offered him, he took it and became something more. Any other standard defeats its own object. The man who merely clings to a moral law will find it fail him when he needs it most."

His persistency had begun to tell on her; she knew perfectly well toward what all this was tending. She had begun to see that, granting his premise, his logic was unanswerable, and that, as an orthodox Christian, she was bound to grant it. If the Church were the custodian of abstract truth, then it had an answer ready for every conceivable emergency. All she had to do was to put herself into its hands and obey—as any Roman peasant would have done. The fact that Cuthbert's own branch of the Church was not in the habit of insisting upon this logical deduction did not shake his position in the least. Neither did the fact that the same line of argument had justified the massacre of St. Bartholomew. That was merely a breach of faith on the part of a corrupt priesthood. Cuthbert did insist upon it, and he was not corrupt. His paramount purpose in all this was to help her, she knew that well enough, as he went on with increased earnestness:—

"God is the source, the only source, of all goodness; yet God in His very nature is unknowable, becomes knowable only through the revelation of Christ. That revelation has come down to us not only through a book, but through an Organization which stretches back through the ages to the feet of Christ. If every scrap of writing in the uni-

verse were blotted out, the thing would live because it is Divine. It is our only guide, because it is the only revelation of clear authority from God to man. It was not merely the spasmodic brilliance shed by the life of a carpenter of Nazareth, though in His death and resurrection it found its proof. It began in the beginning, growing as men grew, guiding them, raising them, supporting them, with their only possible knowledge of God, never failing in its benign influence, save by the unworthiness of its own priesthood. If it has failed you in your hour of need, the fault is mine."

It was clearly evident that he meant every word he said, that in trying to help her he was trying to give her the very best he had to give. A quick protest rose to her lips at his self-condemnation, so painfully sincere. She could not know that even then he was saying to himself, "*You let her father sell her to Levenson.*"

"No, no, no!" she cried, in genuine contrition. "There is no fault anywhere save in myself. I have been impatient with the conditions of my own life. Forget that I have ever spoken of it. I will not, I will not fail again."

She had turned from him and was walking restlessly up and down the room, a thing most unusual with her. Her hands were working nervously as she raised them to her throat, as if something choked her. In doing so her eyes caught the carved figure on the great panel. Cuthbert spoke again. That her eyes were resting on the figure did not escape him.

"Margaret," he went on kindly, but with a touch of sternness in his voice, "since the day of your confirmation you have received at my hands all the privileges of our Church. I cannot believe you insincere, yet it seems to me evident that you find no inspiration, draw no strength, from your belief."

The troubled look on her face had deepened to positive

distress, but it was not in her nature to dodge an issue. In her heart she almost thanked him for having raised it again in a way which forced an answer. He was only asking the same question she had asked herself that night after she had left Doniphan. She had failed to answer it then, she answered it now, slowly, painfully, but honestly.

"It is not real to me,—that is, as you put it, a Living Force. I am not speaking of creeds, of articles of faith; I have always subscribed to them, perhaps merely from old habit, but nevertheless sincerely. But what you mean is something more, something strong enough, not only to make us give up happiness, but to give it cheerfully, uncomplainingly. I have not been able to do that."

Cuthbert's eyes glowed. Fresh hope was stirring within him. If she but acknowledged the Great Central Authority, all was well. To the suffering apostate he could be as cold as ice, for the injured daughter of the Church he had a fund of sympathy without limit and without price.

"If you are true to the Faith itself, the rest will come," he said, with a gentleness she had never heard in his voice before. "You know what it has done for other lives, you will see what it can do for you."

"Pray do not misunderstand me," she cried earnestly. "I doubt much, most of all myself. What good comes of belief in the fact of the *Resurrection* if you do not feel its *Power*, cannot grasp its *Purpose*? What use of a Crucifixion, a renunciation, a self-annihilation that leads to nothing but a triumph of wrong?"

She drew herself up abruptly, feeling she had already said too much, and he, seeing she was overwrought, did not press her further. He merely said a few encouraging words, nothing more; yet they fell on deaf ears. The meeting had revived in her all her old suffering. An hour before she had lost herself in the happiness of others; all this had merely plunged her back into that sea of uncer-

tainty she was trying to forget. Her association with the Rectory study was always the same afterward. It seemed to her a valley of unrest, of indecision.

Cuthbert was very far from suspecting this. He had really changed places with his niece; as her spirits had sunk, his had risen. The great dread in his mind had not been verified, — the dread of a shaken loyalty in her. It was the thing which had come nearest to wrecking his own life, the only thing he really feared. But beyond all that, he meant to do what he could to lighten the girl's load, and his opportunity there was not long in coming.

He had just got back to the study from seeing his niece out when the letters of the noon mail were brought in. He was running them over absently, his mind still on Margaret, when a Club letter-head and a handwriting caught his eye, — the same Club the name of which Margaret had given him.

He tore open the envelope hastily. It contained one of the pleasantest letters he had ever received from Ashton Leverson.

It spoke casually of being detained in town on business, and regretted that in the hurry of departure he, Leverson, had neglected to redeem a promise he had made the Rector some time since, the promise of a substantial contribution towards the Chime Fund. The Rector had, perhaps, heard by this time that he, Leverson, was shortly to sever his connection with Brockton, and it had struck him as a nice thing to make this parting donation sufficiently impressive to leave a pleasant flavor about his, Leverson's, memory.

(This was so characteristic of the writer Cuthbert could hardly refrain from smiling, though he was in no genial humor.)

Leverson, the letter went on to say, had understood that the Chime Fund still required a thousand dollars to make it effective, and he therefore took great pleasure in enclos-

ing his check for that amount. He felt sure his good friend, the Rector, would enjoy the contribution all the more that it was the direct result of his, Leverson's, fortunate sale of the Brockton Works which enabled him, Leverson, to do the thing without the slightest inconvenience to himself. He only hoped that Mr. Faucon would regret as much as he did the coming severance of their old friendship. He had made the check payable to him instead of the Church Treasurer as a stronger mark of that friendship.

The Rector read the letter over twice, and then began to dissect it piecemeal. It seemed well-nigh impossible that the words could have been written by a guilty man, — yet that jocular reference to his financial success told its own story. As far as that part of the indictment went Cuthbert Faucon stood on firm ground. He need assume nothing in returning the check on that score. But he had no intention of confining himself to that. He sat down at his desk and wrote Leverson a letter the like of which, it is safe to say, he had never written before.

It was the careful letter of a man of the world, softening nothing, yet taking nothing for granted. The check was returned squarely, on the ground that the Rector did not care to have his Church profit by the Colonel's and Leverson's late transactions. He then touched on those matters the mere mention of which made Cuthbert Faucon sick with disgust. He spoke of them merely as rumors, for as yet, unlike Doniphan, he had no confirmation of them, but what he said left no doubt but that he believed them. Only a line at the end spoke of a still possible repentance and mentioned Margaret. When Leverson read that part of it he would at least know that in betraying his trust he had got to reckon with a force, which, while it claimed a divine origin, was quite capable of wielding the weapons of this world. There was a good deal more of a

threat in it than of appeal. At any rate, it was the kind of an appeal which could not be answered by a sneer. When he posted the letter that afternoon the Rector felt that at last the Church had spoken, and spoken very much to the point.

* * * * *

As Margaret passed down the Rectory walk she came abruptly upon a couple of young people who had made themselves extremely comfortable under the shade trees which divided the Rectory lawn from the Church grounds.

Hilda Faucon, on a garden seat, was busily engaged in constructing something of doubtful utility out of raw silk and lace, while Reggie lay at her feet in the Rectory grass, trying to play on a small flageolet.

He had certainly lost no time in following her to the Rectory, Margaret thought, though he seemed to have succeeded in leaving his more serious mood of the morning behind him. Both he and Hilda suspended their respective employments as they caught sight of her.

"Do come and join us," the younger lady called out almost eagerly, dropping a monument of raw silk on Reggie as she hastened towards Margaret. "You've spent every minute of your time with papa, so far."

"No, I mustn't, though I rather envy you. What have you found to do out here?"

"We're improving our minds," Reggie remarked smilingly, as he joined them. "You improved yours long ago, so we mustn't keep you if you've got any engagements."

Margaret agreed with him despite Hilda's protest. She was not capable just then of following Reggie's varying moods; the best she could do was to wave the lovers a smiling farewell as she drove off. She could see plainly enough, that if they were not as yet entirely happy, they would be all in good time. She was, at last, pretty sure of Hilda's sentiments, and that was the all-important.

It may have been selfish in her, but for the moment her own affairs claimed her rather imperatively. Without her volition the question had risen in her mind, Would they, Mobray Doniphan, Cuthbert Faucon, and the rest, have met this life, which stretched before *her*, through interminable years, rejoicing in its opportunity of self-negation? And she was so young and life might have been so sweet to her.

* * * * *

Margaret had left the three infant Lindleys safely under the shadow of the parental roof-tree, and was driving slowly through Brockton on her way home. The main street was so much more crowded than usual that afternoon that her attention became gradually more and more absorbed in the task of guiding her pony through its thickening maze of vehicles and pedestrians. Presently he came to a full stop in a hopeless jam of country wagons, covered buggies, and dodging foot passengers, where either turning or going forward seemed equally impossible.

Roused by the necessities of the situation, she glanced across this barrier and discovered the cause of the congestion in a densely packed mass of human beings in the street beyond, — a mass that stretched unbrokenly across the street and over the grounds of the old Town Hall.

Across the heavy posts and rail of its white wooden steps a rough platform of planks had been raised, and on this platform a man was speaking. Margaret recognized instantly the graceful carriage of the tall figure, — the bared head surmounted by its crown of long, wavy hair. Curiously the thought of him had come to her but a few minutes before, coupled with the word "martyrdom," yet as she first caught sight of him he seemed much less a personification of martyrdom than of triumph.

The crowd were listening to every word that fell from his lips with an eagerness almost hungry. Though she was too far away to hear what was said, she could see the

human mass sway under his words; could feel the vibration that ran from the inner to the outer ranks; could hear the low murmur that rippled across its surface like the first breath of a storm across still water.

All at once, as she sat watching it, it broke in answer to some sharp, crisp sentence of the speaker, into a roar of applause that rose and swelled and lingered like a peal of thunder over the sea of uplifted arms and upturned faces.

"'E's come out flat-footed at last for ther hultimatum, 'e 'as," Mr. Gillis remarked, as he pushed his way out of the throng toward the freer space on the curb near where Margaret had drawn up. "Hit means ther settlin' of hall differences betwixt th' Union and th' Brotherhood. That's wot yer git from 'avin' street preachin'! Hi calls hit immoral, hi does!"

"Curious beggar that," another man remarked, as he carefully lit a short clay pipe. "Got the tongue of a politician, he has, but he'll turn tail fast enough when the fight's once on. Them glib talkers is all alike, and don't ye forgit it!"

But these speakers were in an apparently hopeless minority, to judge from the vigorous protest instantly bestowed on their expressed opinions, so vigorous that both the opinions and their authors presently melted away into the safer distance.

Margaret had been watching it all curiously, but now her eyes were drawn irresistibly to the centre of interest on the platform. He was speaking more rapidly now, bending forward slightly, hand outstretched as if in personal appeal. Then the voice ceased, he stepped back on the rough planks, and made a motion as if to enjoin silence.

But it was too late then. Till now he had been carrying the crowd with him, but as he finished speaking it slipped through his fingers and got beyond his control. In fact the mighty shout which burst from five hundred throats

actually drowned his last words. A black mass of humanity was already surging around the planks on which he stood. In a twinkling they were upon the shoulders of fifty men, the idol of the moment standing there in mute protest against the storm he himself had raised.

Down the street they came, the spectators making way for them as best they might, while taking up the cry which had reached them from those nearer the front.

"They can't sell us with the Works!"

Several women were laughing and crying hysterically. Many men were laughing; some were swearing. Margaret had been recognized by several pairs of angry eyes. One man bawled out the name of Levenson, coupled with an oath.

The situation was fast becoming dangerous for the girl, though, lost in the bitter revelations which had just come to her, she did not think of that. She had heard vaguely that the sale of the Levenson Works was not popular among the workmen, but had supposed that it came from a natural reluctance to part with Levenson's liberal management. She had not dreamed of this point of view. Was she then fated to leave Brockton amid the curses of people whom she had known, at least by sight, all her life?

The raised platform, borne in triumph on the human stream, was passing her at the instant. Some one had placed a rush-bottom chair upon it, and they had forced the idol into it. He sat there, looking down upon the upturned faces, no light of triumph, but that expression of unutterable sadness she already knew so well, upon his own.

Was he reading the fate of his own Cause in this mighty overflow of the passions of a populace he had tried to guide and failed? Was he thinking at the moment that he should give his life to it—for nothing?

It was then that his eyes caught hers. Never to the end of her life did she forget the look that came into his

face. She had been leaning forward breathlessly, intense interrogation, the eternal question, on her slightly parted lips and in her eyes. He made a slight gesture of the hands, — his lips smiled, moved, and he passed on.

The spell was broken the moment he was gone. The crowd had surged up against the jam of vehicles; the major part of it was, as yet, good-natured, but it was distinctly rough.

"That's Levenson's wife!" one woman shouted, pointing a dirty index finger at Margaret. "She's got the profits of the deal up her sleeve. Let's divide."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally.

"She might give us a ride, anyhow," suggested a huge raftsman, with a loud guffaw; "there's just room enough for me in that 'ere little kirridge."

This banter failed to intimidate Margaret; it merely roused her indignation. The farther end of the street was clearing rapidly. She tried to turn the pony's head toward an opening when the man who had spoken last seized the bridle. Things were at a crisis with Margaret.

Some one swung up into the seat beside her.

"Suppose you let me drive," a familiar voice remarked pleasantly. "That's right, Briggs! Turn him a bit more, will you? So! we're off!"

Mobray Doniphan had taken the reins out of her hands, and, before she knew what he was about, was driving rapidly toward Elmhurst. The mob gave them a parting cheer indicative of high approval, the little man being extremely popular.

"What does all this mean?" Margaret asked, having collected herself, and glancing back over her shoulder.

"Mere squall," Doniphan rejoined, smiling at her reassuringly; "but if you refer to the near future, it means war!"

CHAPTER XXXI

OF CONTROLLING INTERESTS, FINANCIAL AND OTHERWISE

THE next two weeks, though crowded to their fullest capacity for most of the actors in this small drama, brought no climax.

The ominous growl of the wage-earners of Brockton had been succeeded by no further signs of madness. That dangerous animal, Organized Labor, though clearly irritable, was not frothing. There was as yet no earthly excuse for shooting it. Its ultimatum, that on the first day of September it would accept no scale but the old scale, seemed, for the time at least, to have satisfied its desire for self-assertion.

The new Company had taken quiet possession of the Levenson Works, and the men were, to all seeming, quietly fulfilling their contract; yet there was a subdued excitement noticeable underneath the surface calm, a certain activity among the professional agitators, many meetings after working hours.

At this period the Slathers contingent, in complete control of the old Union, was assiduously cultivating that smaller body in which Meyer had made himself felt, and the association of the higher mechanics, still much under the influence of Mobray Doniphan.

They had, in fact, in times past, owed him a good deal. His position as a stockholder and Director of the old Company had been used more than once to further what he had considered their rights, though he had never forgotten

that he represented other stockholders besides himself. It had, of course, been merely a question of influence, not of voting power. Whenever any one of his ideas had taken shape, it had been only by his convincing Leverson and Whitelaw that it was a wise thing to do.

And now that he had neither power nor influence with their employers, his following did not seem inclined to forget him. On the contrary, when it was discovered that he had refused to have anything to do with the new Management, his popularity visibly increased. The *entente cordiale* between the various factions was for the moment well-nigh perfect, too perfect for the peace of mind of Colonel Mortimer Gilbreed.

That first open threat of the allied labor forces was not only still causing the Senator-elect much uneasiness, but had begun to cause him some tangible embarrassment. Rumors of impending trouble, not only in Brockton, but in other places, had, of course, been fully discussed by an enterprising press; and, as a natural consequence, an impatient public had not as yet shown any signs of "taking hold" of those magnificent opportunities for investment offered them by certain disinterested and patriotic gentlemen.

The stock of The Consolidated had dropped to par and then to eighty. If Higgins had only had the sense to cover at these figures, the Colonel could have forgiven him; but instead of doing that the man "went short" more heavily than ever.

The situation was becoming — from the Colonel's standpoint — a trifle hazy. The men who were to stand "shoulder to shoulder" were all standing just where he had left them when he got back to Philadelphia. They were even willing to show him their certificates, if he would take the trouble to step around to some of the banks where they were deposited as collateral for sundry

small loans. (The Consolidated was only taken on a large margin at that time.)

Of course there was a leak somewhere. The Colonel found it when he found Levenson.

It had been a habit of some years' standing with Levenson to raise what ready money he needed by the simple expedient of selling securities outright. Under the Colonel's tutorship, however, Levenson had seen a new light, and, anxious to show himself progressive, had improved on his former methods by putting up his outside securities and selling The Consolidated short. He told the whole story to his father-in-law with unpardonable pride.

The Colonel very seldom swore, but he swore then most damnably. He did not even take the trouble to go through his usual formula about robbing the widow and the orphan. He tersely explained to Levenson that when no one wants to buy a stock, the forced sale of a very small amount of it upsets things dreadfully. Levenson's defence that he had been counting on that eager and impatient public, as prophesied by the Colonel, was worse than his offence, and only made the latter angrier than ever. He inquired icily why any one should sell a stock short when they expected it to go up, or why doing so should be expected to put it up. Beyond this the Colonel refrained from argument with a man whose powers of penetration had not prevented him from bearing his own securities. He merely waived aside further controversy with a weary smile expressive of "What's the use?"

Although Levenson had by this time received his allotment of stock, the Colonel so far rectified matters as to make him buy back in open market every share he had sold, which he was able to do at a profit. To the day of his death Levenson could never see why he had not managed that part of the business very well.

This last move came in the nick of time. Some other

people besides Higgins began to grow uneasy and to buy, and for the first time the gentlemen standing shoulder to shoulder became valuable. As they were not a purchasing syndicate, they were of no earthly use on a falling market, but when the market began to go up they were worth their weight in gold. They had promised they wouldn't sell under two-seventy, and they wouldn't.

Things began to look sunny again for the Great Combine, but it was in this hour of comparative calm that the Colonel began to take serious counsel with himself.

He had begun to see that he was playing a game which can only be played safely on a very large scale. Even when Higgins came to him a few days later and begged for mercy, the Colonel was by no means elated. He was kind, and (considering the circumstances) even gentle with Higgins, but he was very firm. Due regard for his own safety prevented him from being anything else.

To the usual appeal that Higgins's wife and children would assuredly suffer starvation in case of that gentleman's failure, the Colonel responded that Higgins himself should have thought of that before maturing plans for stabbing him (the Colonel) and his associates in the back. The Colonel was pained, deeply pained, at his inability to assist him, but how could he possibly do so without going back on men who had stood by him nobly in his hour of need.

Nevertheless, after he had smilingly bowed out Higgins, the Colonel became pensive again. For the time being he had the upper hand, but the situation was feverish, far too feverish for solid comfort. Leverson had become restless again and might at any moment kick over the traces.

While in far-away Brockton several much better men than himself had been worrying over his morals, Leverson had been enjoying himself after his own sweet fashion ;

but with the Colonel's advent he had awakened, not to the danger of losing his soul, but to the much more tangible danger of losing his money. The Colonel had been quite right in assuring Doniphan that no one could handle Leverson as he could, but even *his* hold might slip at any moment now.

In the meantime numerous articles were appearing in the financial press, discussing with a painful lack of enthusiasm the prospects of the Consolidated Car Company. Any strength the stock had was attributable to short covering, and that, in the very nature of things, could not last. It seemed, in short, quite possible to the thoughtful Colonel, that, after ruining Higgins, he and Leverson might be ruined in turn.

Without in any way admitting this to his sensitive and easily alarmed son-in-law, the Colonel at this juncture made a move which, whether it led to success or failure, was calculated to put him out of his misery.

After long consultations with numerous gentlemen in Philadelphia, he took Leverson on to New York to see an Eminent Specialist on the cruel nervous disease from which he, the Colonel, was suffering, and which Leverson was liable to take at any time.

Now there are certain localities on this planet where one must step carefully if one would avoid getting his toes trodden upon. The shadow of Trinity Church covers an area where no one's toes are safe for a moment if they do not drive. Stepping on other people's toes has always been a favorite amusement of the place, and though originally instituted by the natives as a harmless little game to be played at the expense of the outsider, the outsiders have since become so numerous and skilful that even the native's toes have become exceedingly sensitive.

Leverson, whose manners were sufficiently overbearing to make him easily mistaken for an habitué of the place,

went down Wall Street on foot quite uninjured. Many professional heel-and-toe performers got out of his way in a hurry, he *looked* so dangerous ; but the Colonel, whose natural courtesy made him as conspicuous as if he had recently powdered his hair with hay-seed, preferred to take a cab through the mazes of this great arena where this charming sport ever goes merrily on, — where the wicked do not cease from troubling, and the weary are not at rest.

The place is not what careless criticism has so often asserted it to be, a mere gambling hell on a gigantic scale. If it were, its potency for evil would be comparatively limited. The misfortunes of Canfield's Card Rooms do not keep conservative business men and bona fide investors awake o' nights. True, it has its inveterate gamblers, who, like the Colonel, drift toward it as inevitably as the summer moth drifts toward its alluring beacon of burning kerosene, but they come to be scorched, or to escape scorching, drift away again, and are deservedly forgotten.

But the fuel which feeds this ever burning Aladdin's lamp is drawn from no less a source than the industries of a Great Nation, — industries from which millions of men must draw their daily bread, and into which millions of men and women must put their daily savings. Here at last the Colonel's brilliant figure of speech becomes a hard reality. He is quite right, you cannot injure him without injuring them also. Even here the storms of adversity or the sunshine of prosperity fall alike on the just and on the unjust. Even here the brotherhood of man holds good. Even here the mystery of evil is as impenetrable as ever.

But there is a third element, which, for any proper understanding of this curious locality, must be taken into account, as the Colonel was even then taking it into account most carefully.

The Eminent Specialist in whose outer office the Colonel and Leverson are now humbly waiting represents this third element to perfection. This man never openly enters the game going on outside, yet the game could not go on a moment without him. He is no more afraid of the stock-market than the Almighty is of a thunder-storm, and for the same reason, — because he controls it.

His serious business in life is the loaning of other people's money, with the pleasing alternate of refusing to loan it. In the first instance the market goes up; in the second, down. If he should so far forget himself as to buy anything, it could never be anything short of a controlling interest, and then only when its profitable sale is already contracted for.

He is, in short, a sort of financial agriculturist on an enormous scale. By an ingenious system of irrigation he can bring his crop to maturity with marvellous despatch and absolute certainty, and its market lies at his very door. His prosperity is so great that it has developed in him a liberal, not to say, generous disposition, so generous that he frequently insists on loaning money to corporations, the minority stockholders of which do not want to borrow it. A small majority are, curiously enough, always anxious to borrow it on almost any terms.

By these simple means this gentleman has accumulated a gigantic fortune, and, what he prizes still more highly, a gigantic reputation. On the mere rumor that he is about to take hold of a property, people in the street outside tumble over each other to get the stock. Whenever he floats an issue of bonds at par they invariably go to a premium before they have floated as far as the next corner. The friendship of such a man to any one anxious to lay aside a little money for his old age is as cold water to a thirsty soul.

Now the Colonel, who had known this gentleman very

well in times past, was not foolish enough to come to him with anything less than a controlling interest buttoned up in the breast pocket of his light sack coat. He had spent a week and considerable labor in Philadelphia getting it together, and he counted on it to secure a pleasant reception for himself and Levenson at the hands of this honest agriculturist who sat behind a mahogany desk in the inner office when they were ushered in.

Whether it were that or the Colonel's assured political position which made the greater man decently civil there is no means of knowing, but civil he was from the very start, though at first he was not very encouraging. He actually took the necessary time and trouble to point out the serious error so far made in the organization of the Consolidated Company, reminding the Colonel that it had taken in very few of the Western plants, and must, therefore, meet keen competition from the start. He remarked that the construction of the thing was hopelessly provincial; that it carried too much sail and not enough ballast, and showed a painful tendency to upset before it was fairly launched.

Without continuing the metaphor, the Colonel inquired if this difficulty could not be overcome by pumping more water into it, whereupon the great man admitted that more complicated things had been done, and confessed that the bonded debt of the concern was ridiculously small.

Levenson, much depressed by all this, especially by that reference to the Western plants, saw visions of long journeys before him, but presently revived again on learning that the Western plants were locked up in a safe deposit box belonging to a gentleman just across the street. The Eminent Specialist could not possibly see this gentleman at that time as he, the Specialist, was already overdue at a vestry meeting uptown, but he would see him the next day and report if anything could be done.

The Colonel had an awful night of it with Leverson, who had begun to show the first symptom of that dangerous nervous malady. He wanted to know a great many unreasonable things, amongst others why two lame ducks tied together should sell any better than one lame duck. He wanted to get out of the thing then and there while he could do so at a handsome profit.

The Colonel explained to him, with marvellous patience, that the Stock Exchange doors were closed to him, and that two thousand shares would break the market on the curb; that such ducks as they had for sale could only be sold here when properly branded, and that the Eminent Specialist owned the brand. If he could once be persuaded to give their little enterprise his benediction, the popular passion for ducks would be practically unappeasable. It was not a case of taking less and being satisfied, but a case of taking a great deal more, or nothing.

It was, in fact, a horrid night for the warm and weary Colonel, but he had his reward. When he came down the steps of the Eminent Specialist's office the next afternoon he felt as if all his cares and worries in this world were over, and he had not as yet begun to worry about the next.

There had been a conference of various interests, and the Eminent One had been persuaded to take hold. The gentleman with the Western plants secreted somewhere about his person had made some trouble, but had been "brought round." Even the Colonel was a little hazy as to the exact conditions, but he had got the net result down on paper and, though it was not two-seventy, he was forced to admit that it was "enough."

It seemed hardly possible that less than two weeks before he, Mortimer Gilbreed, had been actually trying to bribe a man like Meyer to shut down on an incipient strike in a two-cent Pennsylvania town. The man who was running the thing now was more indifferent to strikes than

he was to mosquitoes, and had probably forgotten by this time that there was such a place as Brockton. Brockton, the Colonel's point of departure, had become a small speck on the horizon by this time. However, he sent Whitelaw his promised cipher telegram, advising him of these late transactions and guaranteeing a satisfactory market within a month or two.

In spite of Whitelaw's threatened independence, the Colonel was very sure he had not sold a share. When the worst was said of him, Whitelaw was a gentleman. Of course the Colonel advised against any negotiations with Slathers; it was a positive delight to him that such dirty work of the Company was actually over. They could strike now to their hearts' content, for anything he cared.

Then and then only did the Colonel find time to write to Doniphan. He had been safe from Doniphan's interference for the last ten days, for he had been carrying Leverson round with him so that nobody could hurt him; but under the flush of his late success he felt he could assert himself with considerable vigor, and that he owed it to his own dignity to do so.

The letter was curt to an extent most unusual with the Colonel. He began by informing his correspondent that he had not thought it wise to discuss with Leverson the painful subject which he, Doniphan, had so unnecessarily brought up at their last meeting in Brockton. To have done so would have been to offer Leverson a gratuitous insult, and, as perhaps Doniphan was aware, Leverson was not a man to be insulted with impunity. If it was any satisfaction to Doniphan to know it, he, the Colonel, had found Leverson deeply immersed in important business, and obviously as unacquainted as he was indifferent to the whereabouts of that wretched young woman whose name he had forgotten. He should not have taken the trouble to refer to the matter again had it not been that

he wished to caution Doniphan against spreading that sort of despicable gossip any farther. If it spread, he should, of course, feel in duty bound to call Leverson's attention to it, which Doniphan must see would make things most unpleasant in view of Leverson's violent temper. He ended with some airy remarks about his late financial success, and remained forever very truly Doniphan's.

If the Colonel had been in truth and verity Doniphan's own forevermore, that wiry little gentleman could hardly have looked more disgusted as, after its perusal, he crushed the Colonel's delicately scented note into a shapeless mass between his long muscular fingers.

A moment later, however, he carefully smoothed it out again on his table blotter and went to consult with Thallon, who for the last day or two had been convalescing at the Hill Farm.

He found him propped up on the lounge of one of the large ground-floor bedrooms, where Doniphan's housekeeper had just left him well employed with a large bowl of broth. Save for a bandaged head and arm, the pallor of his face, and somewhat sunken cheeks, the young man did not look much worse for the cowardly crime of which he had been the victim. He held his bandaged head as high as ever and was evidently not off the board as yet.

Remembering his invalidism, Doniphan had tried to be reasonable in his drafts upon Thallon's slowly returning strength, but he had been unable to deny himself one or two long "talks" with him.

The conditions which had brought these two so abruptly into a closer fellowship had not been the deliberate choice of either. Doniphan had not in any strict sense offered Thallon his confidence; he had, quite unexpectedly, since that last interview with Reggie, found the younger man possessed of it. Thallon, on his side, had done nothing to

force himself into this new relationship; he had simply waked to find himself there.

Though the trust as yet had been all on one side, it had been thorough; Doniphan's present errand needed no explanation. Without preface he put the Colonel's letter into Thallon's hand.

"Read that, and tell me what you think of it," was all he said.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BARRIERS BREAK DOWN

THALLON had evidently been employed during the morning, for the farther side of the table was strewn with bundles of letters and papers. A leathern valise bound in brass lay wide open on the floor below, while beside it Twist kept careful guard. Since Thallon's advent at the Hill Farm, Twist had deserted Doniphan.

The young man took the note without speaking and read it hurriedly, as if he had been anxiously waiting for it, Doniphan watching him narrowly meanwhile, the quirk in the corner of his mouth expressive of several things.

Its perusal was not lengthy. The Colonel's little composition in black and white covered barely two sides of a sheet of letter paper, yet the change which passed over the reader's face as he ran his eye over the sprawling, irregular lines was enough to satisfy even Doniphan.

"You see I'm practically told to mind my own business," he remarked grimly, as Thallon dropped the paper and looked up at him. "Gilbreed thinks that if Leverson comes back to Brockton with due regard for outside appearances, my hands are tied. He thinks that under those circumstances I won't tell Margaret or do anything else to bring on a crisis. All he wants is time."

"And yet the crisis has got to come," the other man returned, with something like elation in his voice. "Ash-ton Leverson will never change, and sooner or later she must know."

"Yes, sooner or later she must know," Doniphan repeated moodily; "the unknown quantity in the problem is not what effect her hearing of it will have on Leverson, but what effect it will have on Margaret. Reggie's idea is that she would leave him instantly. Well, suppose she does?"

Thallon swung himself round on the couch, his eyes on fire.

"Any tribunal — any court — any church — would set her free," he cried hoarsely.

Doniphan's eyes met his squarely. Thallon felt as if they were reading the deepest depths in him.

"Free to marry again?" the elder man asked composedly.

The hot color mounted to Thallon's face. Doniphan could see the pulse in his temples throbbing.

"After long years why not?" the younger man demanded defiantly.

"Well, largely because she's Margaret Leverson," Doniphan returned slowly. "We none of us move except within certain limits built round us by what we call our consciences. Very wide limits sometimes such as enclose Leverson, very narrow ones such as hedge in a girl like his wife. I have fought zealously against the life which such a conscience might make her live with Leverson, but I can picture to myself a still worse life without him. She is very young; everything as yet lies before her. There's hardly any question but that in the years to come she would meet some one she might have —"

"Yes, yes, I know," the other put in eagerly; "and you would deny her right?"

"No, I would not, but she would. She would never marry while he lived. Her struggle now is easy compared to what it would be then; she's tied to him, whether she breaks with him or not, down to his grave or hers."

Thallon rose to his feet, swaying slightly, but more from excitement than weakness. He rejected with an impatient motion of the head the supporting arm Doniphan hastened to offer.

"It's monstrous, cruel, brutal," he said huskily.

"I grant all that," Doniphan returned quietly, "all the more readily because the position you take is the same I've taken many a time before. I told Faucon I wouldn't see her lead the life her mother did if I could prevent it, and I won't; but I've got to prevent it some other way than that, — I've got to bring some pressure to bear on Lever-son."

Thallon, who had taken a step or two across the room, paused abruptly and turned a strangely startled face toward the elder man.

"You've already tried that and failed," he said.

"Yes, I know. I miscalculated his desire to keep this last episode quiet. He did want to keep it quiet at first, but on discovery he merely shrugs his shoulders and tells you to do your worst. I had a note from Cuthbert Faucon some time since, enclosing a copy of a letter he wrote Leverson, — a strong, manly letter, — and Leverson's answer. The last shows pretty conclusively how much Leverson cares for mere opinion; even the comparatively valued opinion of such a man as Faucon. He does not even take the trouble to deny the charge. I doubt if he would have done so, even if he had been innocent. I believe now he would not care a farthing if his wife were told of the affair to-morrow. After all, Faucon's right! If the man could only be made afraid of hell, we might do something with him."

Thallon's eyes were fixed, not on the speaker, but on a long yellow envelope hastily torn open, which lay with the other mail matter on the table beside him.

"He cares for nothing but his position," he said slowly,

as if he were thinking aloud, "and fears nothing in heaven and earth but the loss of it."

Doniphan emitted one of these low guttural sounds indicative of extreme disgust.

"Even that might not be effective," he growled. "A week ago I thought his chances of losing his money were fairly good. In fact he's been worried about losing it these last two months, but that hasn't reformed him. I confess I thought the Colonel had engineered him into a position where some one man could have controlled the situation and dictated terms, but that's past now. For once in his life the Colonel's brought his little gamble into port. They've got the backing they wanted in New York; you see he refers to it. Bah! The Heathen, as Faucon calls him, bows down to good eighteen carat gold, these days. Money reigns, it pays for what it wants, and the opinions of a few poor devils like ourselves may go hang."

Thallon had picked up the yellow envelope and was turning it over mechanically in his hand. When he spoke again, after a pause, it was with slightly increased emphasis.

"Then you don't think that if Leverson lost his money it would kill him?" he asked, with slightly knitted brows.

"Kill him! No such luck, it wouldn't even improve him," Doniphan said, with his habitual angry snort. "If the crash actually came, he wouldn't turn to earning his own living; he couldn't do it now, even if he wanted to. He'd simply take to gambling on a smaller scale. Every dollar he could beg or borrow would go on to cards or horses. Perhaps morally speaking he's no better than that now; but the larger game isn't, when all's said, quite so nasty as the other thing. The gambler's wife doesn't have to sit up for him all night in a dingy third-story back room. The butler does the sitting up, and they have separate rooms."

The bitter irony of the words hardly covered the intense sadness lying beneath them. Thallon shivered. The pic-

ture of such a life for her had been slowly forcing itself upon him, but he had not yet admitted it as inevitable. During these last weeks of convalescence he had fought against it stubbornly, aiding his willing mind to think of her as something apart from Leverson. No! such a monstrous sacrifice could be asked neither of her nor of himself. Sooner or later she would learn what the man was, break from him, — and then! —

Now, however, what Doniphan had said of her rang true. For a woman like Margaret Leverson the tie would hold, go where she would. If the man lost his money, she was all the more likely to stick to him. In spite of his own bruised spirit a great wave of reverence, which might have been sentiment, but was healthy sentiment, swept over him as he thought of it.

"You spoke of bringing some sort of pressure to bear on him?" he said, with a note of inquiry in his voice.

"Ah, that's different. If the man owed his fortune to me, I'd make conditions."

"Ah, but would he hold to them?"

"Yes; whatever else he is, Leverson is not a liar. Curiously enough he finds his limit there, as we all find it somewhere. He'd stick to an agreement if one could be forced on him. But what's the use of wasting breath on that; such situations don't occur in real life."

Both men had spoken with increasing rapidity. Thallon's growing excitement had communicated itself to Doniphan without his quite comprehending it. The former had drawn a typewritten letter out of the yellow envelope, had seated himself before the table, and spread out its closely written sheets before him. It contained an enclosure which had a legal look about it.

"Things like that don't happen every day; but they do happen," he said, with a sudden change of manner.

"Things! What things?"

"Things that control, situations that dominate even men like Leverson. It's not unthinkable that one of his literary hacks might supply a means, might become a factor in such a situation. I say might, for as yet the work is only half done, but it might be furnished in time, in time to help her."

Doniphan looked at his companion with serious disquietude. He had noticed his first excitement, its abrupt collapse into the almost studied calm with which he had uttered those last words, a calmness fitting ill with the incoherence of the words themselves. Had he, Doniphan, asked too much of a man just recovered from serious shock? Was it possible that under this added strain Owen Thallon's brain had given way?

"My dear boy," Doniphan said, with quick compunction, as he put a kindly hand on the other's shoulder, "don't try and think it out to-day. I did wrong to bother you about it now."

Thallon looked up at him over his shoulder, a curious smile playing about his mouth. He knew quite well what was passing in the other's mind. He had been carefully putting together the half-dozen typewritten sheets that lay on the table before him. There was no trace of hesitation in his manner as he turned and handed them to Doniphan. He had made up his mind what he was going to do some little time before.

"The story's a long one," he remarked, in answer to a look Doniphan gave him as he took them, "but it's put down there as concisely as it can be. As you said of the Colonel's note just now, 'Read it, and tell me what you think of it.'"

Mad as he was, there was certainly method in him. Doniphan's pained sense that he must humor a crazy man was contending now with a deeper, subtler sense that he was upon the brink of a clearer understanding of impor-

tant things. He must have divined it from the cool assurance of the other's tone.

It was perhaps predominant as he fixed his eyes on the paper which might hold the key to this enigma.

The first page contained a short business letter dated Belle Plain, Iowa, July 8, 1891, which ran as follows:—

MR. OWEN THALLON, Everett House, Brockton, Pa.

DEAR SIR, — Your favor of the — inst. reached us two weeks since, as we acknowledged at the time. Owing to Mr. Warner's absence from town, we were unable until now to comply with either of the two requests contained in that letter. Your desire that the photograph you sent be submitted to Mr. Warner has now been fulfilled, but we are sorry to say that he was unable to identify it as a portrait of John Thallon.

As you already know, Mr. Thallon's dealings with his firm, something over twenty-seven years ago, brought him very little into personal contact with Mr. Warner. Almost all Mr. Thallon's transactions with this firm were conducted through its then senior partner, Mr. Murray, who died, as you are also aware, three years ago. Mr. Warner remembers to have seen Mr. Thallon but twice. Mr. Thallon was at the time a smooth-faced young man of perhaps two or three and twenty. This portrait of a heavily bearded man of forty-five or fifty bears, as far as Mr. Warner is able to see, no resemblance to him. The photograph is therefore returned with regret at our inability to assist you.

Your second request, that we forward to you a certain affidavit made by Mr. Murray at your request about six months before his death in 1888, said affidavit covering all the facts and circumstances which connected him with John Thallon between the early spring of 1863 and that date, is cheerfully complied with. You will observe that the affidavit is duly sworn to before a Justice of the Peace of this township. It contains nothing, we believe, you are not already fully acquainted with through Mr. Murray, but it has unquestionably a certain legal value as evidence, as it was intended to have.

If at any time we can be of any further service to you in this matter, we shall be pleased to receive your commands.

Yours very truly,

Enclosures.

WARNER & WRIGHT.

Doniphan did not even glance at Thallon as he turned over the page to the next document in the case. The

room was deadly still, the breathing of the dog at Thallon's feet, the rustle of the paper, had become noticeable. Doniphan's brows were hard knit as he took in the heading of the next paper.

AFFIDAVIT OF ANDREW MURRAY

Attorney at Law

State of Iowa }
County of — } ss:

Andrew Murray, being duly sworn, deposes and says: —

That he is a citizen of the City of Belle Plain, Iowa, and senior member of the firm of Murray & Warner, Attorneys, of that city, and well known to be such.

That he first made the acquaintance of the man calling himself John Thallon, early in the month of May, 1863. That the said John Thallon was then known to deponent by reputation, as a manufacturer of steel wagon springs in the town of Belle Plain. That upon the occasion aforesaid said Thallon made application to deponent, or to deponent's said firm, for a loan of ten thousand (10,000) dollars, and offered as security therefor his manufacturing plant, exhibiting also to deponent a signed contract between himself and the United States Government, for a large number of springs for army ambulances.

That after proper investigation the said loan was obtained for said Thallon by deponent's firm.

That during the year 1864, the Government having refused to accept certain products of his factory, said Thallon became much embarrassed, if not bankrupt. That he thereupon turned over such assets as he then had to the firm of Murray & Warner, and much against advice of deponent gave up all connection with the business. That some time afterward said Thallon enlisted in Company B, Fifth Iowa Infantry, and about six weeks subsequently deponent discovered in a Belle Plain newspaper the name of the said John Thallon in the list of "Missing" during McCook's Raid on Lovejoy Station, Georgia, on or about July 27, 1864.

That during the month of September, 1864, a young lady, hitherto known to deponent as Miss Lucy Owen, a school-teacher of Belle Plain, called at his office and offered incontestable proof that she had been secretly married to the said John Thallon previous to his enlistment, — that is to say in May, 1864. That the proof offered was a certificate of marriage duly signed by the officiating clergyman and witnessed by two persons still living in the near-by town of —, where the ceremony

took place. That the said certificate was retained by deponent, at Mrs. Thallon's request, until many years afterwards it was given by him, together with her other papers, to her son, Owen Thallon, who was born at Belle Plain on the fifteenth of February, 1865. That Mrs. Thallon survived the birth of this son something less than a month.

That upon her deathbed she informed deponent that she was without immediate family, and that as far as she knew her husband, John Thallon, had left no relatives. That the woman with whom Mrs. Thallon lodged (a Mrs. Allen) had taken a fancy to the child and wished to adopt it. That at the earnest request of both women deponent was preparing the necessary papers to carry out this design when a middle-aged lady, calling herself Miss Thallon, an aunt of John Thallon, called at his office, together with a second, much younger, woman, who appeared to be a servant or companion. That upon being told the situation Miss Thallon not only made no objection to the proposed adoption, but seemed rather eager to have it carried out.

That at Mrs. Thallon's earnest request the adoption of the child by Mrs. Allen took place at once, and that the next day, to wit, March 10, 1865, Mrs. Thallon died.

That upon the day following Mrs. Thallon's funeral both Miss Thallon and her companion left Belle Plain without again communicating with deponent.

That it subsequently came to the knowledge of deponent that Miss Thallon had, before her departure, settled certain outstanding debts of Mrs. Thallon, and had left with Mrs. Allen a small sum of money enclosed in an envelope. That this envelope bore in the upper corner the letter head of Hartley & Bald, Attorneys, Harrisburg, Penn.

That deponent received no communication from any relative of said John Thallon for the next ten years.

That at the end of that period, that is to say, in April, 1875, deponent received a post-office order for one hundred dollars mailed in Philadelphia, and addressed to him as attorney for Owen Thallon, by which name the boy continued to be called. That the envelope this remittance came in contained nothing but the order itself. That remittances of this character were received by deponent with more or less regularity, between the years 1875 and 1883, being always mailed in Philadelphia, but never from the same postal station twice in succession. That toward the end of that period they increased considerably in amount, so that Owen Thallon was sent to college with this money.

That shortly after Mrs. Allen's death, in 1883, an attempt was made by deponent to communicate with the sender through Messrs. Hartley

& Bald, an unsuccessful attempt, that firm advising deponent that they knew of no one by the name of Thallon.

That from that date all remittances ceased.

That the total amount received by deponent, as above, was in the neighborhood of three thousand dollars, for which deponent accounted to Owen Thallon.

That through the entire period of twenty-three years, that is to say, from 1864 to 1887, deponent had believed John Thallon to be dead and Miss Thallon to be his son's benefactor, but that, in the latter part of 1887 (soon after Owen Thallon's graduation), deponent received a brief letter dated at a New York City hotel, and signed John Thallon, said letter enclosing a draft for the amount of judgments against him in Belle Plain, with interest, and requesting deponent to settle the same and return a release to the address given. That in this letter John Thallon made no mention of either his wife or son.

That deponent immediately wrote to said Thallon, expressing surprise at his long silence, supposing him to be aware of his son's existence through Miss Thallon, and informing him as far as possible about the boy. That the following day the firm of Murray & Warner, having followed Mr. Thallon's instructions, returned him the desired releases.

That to these communications neither deponent nor the firm of Murray & Warner have received any reply from Mr. Thallon up to the date of this affidavit.

That deponent immediately communicated the facts above stated to Mr. Owen Thallon, then in the East. That since then (June, 1887) Mr. Owen Thallon has had the management of this mysterious case in his own hands.

(Signed) ANDREW MURRAY.

BELLE PLAIN, IOWA,

Signed and sworn to before }
me this — day of —, 1888. }

ABNER BEST,

Justice of the Peace.

Doniphan rolled up the neatly fastened sheets of foolscap with mechanical precision. Nevertheless, his hand shook a trifle. Both men were deathly pale; the younger man had been restlessly fingering a small photograph which, until Doniphan began reading, had lain face downward on the table. He put out his hand for it now

without speaking. He knew well enough what it was, — a connecting link (perhaps the only one) between the mystery of the younger man's life and several other lives closely touching his own.

In silence Doniphan scanned the small piece of cardboard searchingly, as if he would have forced its story out of the stubborn, rugged face he saw there by sheer force of will. His brain rose to the strain upon it with the discipline given it by years of training. He had entirely forgotten Thallon's last words about Margaret, had, to say truth, forgotten Margaret herself for the moment. His keen sense of justice had ranged itself instantly on the side of the man who sat there watching him closely. He was piecing things together, confirming dates, unearthing motives. All at once everything seemed to swing into its place as if by magic. The complete sequence of events was as clear to him as if he had just docketed incontestable proof of every item in it. He was so busy thinking that he left it to Thallon to speak first.

"He died knowing — and — without making any sign."

The tone of the younger man's voice betrayed the predominant, impelling force which had held him through these last ten years to one settled purpose. The Leverson money could not have done it. He had not known of its existence then. No! What he had wanted was the name, not because he honored or respected it, but because its absence was a stigma, and because it belonged to him.

"I doubt his knowing," Doniphan went on rapidly, as if he had already annexed the Thallon mystery and felt bound to clear it up instant. "He died less than a week after he learned the truth. I remember perfectly. He was taken ill in New York, and came home and died without making any fuss about it as his manner was. Ashton Leverson and Whitelaw were somewhere in the South.

They got here the day John Leverson died, but he was unconscious by that time. He had been feverishly anxious to see his brother, so Lindley told me. Even with Lindley, the only man who saw him, he was as dumb as an oyster, the same close-mouthed, impenetrable man he'd always been."

"If he gave no information, he asked none," Thallon put in bitterly. "He lived all those years believing his wife and his son dead without one inquiry."

"Without knowing his son had ever been born," Doniphan corrected eagerly. "He had that miserable woman's word for that. Why should he go farther for information? She was with his wife when she died."

"What purpose could she have had? There was no money then to guard."

"There were debts to keep him away from. Even with a debit balance Miss Laurie was very cautious. She had her ambitions for him, and from her point of view they've been justified. That's why she lied to him."

"Yes,—but when he knew!"

"It was too late then. I believe now he was anxious to make some sort of settlement which should be just to Ashton. The telegram to Whitelaw had been sent, as Lindley supposed, in plenty of time,—but was it? A delay of twelve hours would have been enough. Who had the handling of that piece of yellow paper? The only one save Lindley who knew that Leverson's life had narrowed down to a question of hours. Lindley would have told her, but not the sick man himself. Yes, I see that clearly enough. She must have deceived even the clever Whitelaw. His being in an out-of-the-way place was sufficient explanation of the delay to him."

"Deceived for the time, yes!" Thallon said thoughtfully, "but not for long. When I came on the scene our family lawyer had the full use of his faculties. He sus-

pected me at the very start through Jane Kirk's partial recognition. He has not been idle since, either. While I've been at the hospital he's been through my mail. You told me he had charge of it."

Doniphan began to see a new meaning in many things. He expressed his joy thereat by a long, low whistle. Then he stopped abruptly, perceiving another difficulty. "But why has he returned this," touching the yellow envelope. "It's not possible he's working on your side; his bread's not buttered that way."

"I give it up. The letter was not even left directly at the hotel, but was sent through the mail enclosed in another envelope, the direction typewritten. I recognize his hand in the transaction, but not in the typewriting, so we shall never be able to prove it. Well, I'll rest content with the recovery of this piece of property, and the knowledge that we have got to watch Randal Whitelaw. After all, it doesn't make much difference. As I said before, my case is by no means complete."

"I would not be too sure of that. Let us at least go over it carefully. Now tell me, what did you do when you heard of the New York draft?" Doniphan's eyes snapped. His enthusiasm puzzled the younger man, for he failed to penetrate the motive, but he answered readily:—

"There was a delay in my getting Murray's letter. When I got to the hotel, my father had got his papers and left. They did not speak of his being ill."

"And the hotel register?"

"Name John Thallon as from Harrisburg, date about a week old. I made a tracing of it."

"And the bank where he got the draft?"

"Couldn't be traced through that. He had simply bought the thing, paying cash for it over the counter."

"What did you do then?"

"Came on to Harrisburg and found a place with Hartley

& Bald through a letter I had from New York. I connected them with the affair partly through the old envelopes of 1864, partly through the Harrisburg address on the hotel register. I made no progress for six months, when some papers came into the office in connection with the formation of the Levenson Company. Among the title deeds was an old mortgage made by John Levenson to Tatnall Doniphan, to secure a loan of twenty thousand dollars."

"Yes, I know ; it was exchanged for stock."

"Well, the signature, or the first name in it, corresponded with the signature on the hotel register, on the letter to Murray, and on those two letters written to my mother from camp in 1864. That aroused my first interest in the name of Levenson. You know the rest."

The man's voice softened strangely when he spoke of his mother. That side of him was uppermost which had first appealed to Doniphan. Until now the dramatic side of this curious and intricate affair had held Doniphan in its thralldom, but now he felt himself swept off his feet by that little touch of suffering humanity. He leaned across the table from the arm of a great easy-chair where he had been sitting swinging his legs.

"By George! but it has been tough on you," he said ; "but keep up your courage, boy. We haven't got much fighting evidence, but we'll win yet, see if we don't."

"You seem to have forgotten what we were talking about a little time ago. There was to be a hold fastened on Levenson. Then we were to make conditions."

Doniphan's jaw dropped, although he had a clear eye on the other man to detect possible trifling.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you want to put this little affair into that deal?"

"I've thought of it."

"Well, dismiss the thought. It can't be done."

"Why?"

"Because the thing isn't salable. If it's an inheritance at all, it's an inheritance that can't be shirked. There are several hundred men and women this thing might mean life and death to."

"And there's one woman to whom it means a shabby third-story back room," the younger man said, without looking up.

A great wave of blood surged into Doniphan's face as he leaned forward across the table and, seizing the other's chin, roughly turned his face toward him.

"Do you know what you're saying?" he demanded, in a voice that shook a little in spite of himself. "Men can't do those things for women like Margaret Levenson. You may love her, but you shan't tell her so."

But Doniphan's hand dropped. For once in his life he had met his match. Thallon had risen to his feet and stood regarding him with cool indifference.

"I will not tell her until she frees herself from him," he said slowly. "I will do nothing to part them. I will throw this secret into the scale if it brings her one moment's respite — *but that is all*. Once she breaks from him of her own free will, I tell you no power in heaven or hell can keep me from her."

The physical power in the man had come to the surface. As he stood there, drawn to his full height, Doniphan noted for the first time the likeness to Ashton Levenson. It was the same Anglo-saxon type, — the superb animal that Cuthbert Faucon had noted as standing in need of Christianizing.

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNSPOKEN

THE same mail which brought Doniphan that ungracious communication from the Colonel brought Margaret a letter from Levenson even less characteristic of the writer, inasmuch as it was written in the best of spirits, and was pervaded by a tone of comradeship with which her husband had not favored her since the termination of their honeymoon. Prosperity was certainly having a benign influence on Levenson.

"I don't see why we shouldn't have a very decent Newport season this year," he wrote. "For once I shall have more money than I know what to do with, and for once your everlasting house accounts may go to the wall. I have just engaged a cook who is guaranteed not to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of the most sensitive host, and several other servants whom you will appreciate as soon as you realize it is not necessary to keep track of their expenditures."

The "we" in the first sentence actually touched Margaret; the whole tone of what followed indicated an interest which, if she chose, might be made a common interest to them both.

And how could she but choose it? Her days of romance were long since over. Levenson, in his success, was offering her a share of his own enjoyment of it, the only kind of enjoyment he was capable of. Moreover, it was perfectly patent to her that she was being offered something

most women would have accepted and been extremely grateful for.

She had been quite unreasonable in supposing she would be offered anything more. She had seen clearly enough for some time now that those idle dreams of hers had been entirely of her own making. It had not seemed possible to her before that she had been raised from poverty to wealth merely to enjoy it in this way. It had not seemed possible that she had been given a soul sensitive to suffering in others, and then the means to relieve so much of it, without the privilege of doing; but that doubtless was merely another of the mysteries. Doniphan had told her she need not worry about her usefulness. Doniphan's scantiness of belief was a source of worry to the Rector, yet the man's faith at least included *that*, a faith that the opportunity would come, or, as Meyer would have said, "be given," and she, who pretended to believe so much more, had lacked it!

After all, this breaking away from the old life was best! In this moment of transition from a restless striving after the unattainable to an acceptance of the only life open to her, she came nearer to a perfect peace than she had known for months.

Away from Brockton, it must be comparatively easy to forget that haunting scene of Meyer's triumph, the woman's coarse banter, her jeer at Levenson's wife, and the newly won Levenson money. It was the echo of tone and gesture rather than any meaning in the words, the contempt and hatred in the brutal face, which clung to her in spite of herself.

The amount of justice in the taunt she had no means of gauging. The intricate transactions connected with the sale of the Levenson Company would have been difficult for her to comprehend had she had any opportunity of studying them, while as a matter of fact they had been

hardly mentioned in her presence. Doniphan, their only hostile critic in the world she lived in, had been careful to keep his position on that point unknown to her. The girl, in his opinion, had enough to stagger under as it was.

Therefore it was easier for her now to tell herself that her dwelling on that scene of the other afternoon was morbid. The whole tone of Levenson's letter was one of triumph in which it seemed her clear duty to share. His estimate of himself as a shrewd and successful financier was much easier for her to accept than most of his estimates of himself.

He had certainly made a great deal of money; every one was speaking of it with unstinted praise. Surely she, his wife, should join in the general chorus. The envy, hatred, and malice of a lower class was probably inevitable under the circumstances. Even a man like Meyer might well be stained with it. That was a thing to be regretted, but hardly a thing to bring discontent and a widening breach between herself and her husband.

She was folding up Levenson's short note, her eyes alight, her face warm with deep feeling, when she got sight of a postscript on the back of the last page.

The Colonel tells me that fellow Thallon is going to get well after all. If it's true, I wish you'd see him and tell him I consider his engagement for the literary work holds good for the summer. Of course I know you were rather down on my going on with it at one time, but I believe Aunt Catherine somewhat misrepresented your motives, and perhaps I was rather hasty to take offence. Anyway, I believe you will approve when I tell you the Ms. has been read by a literary fellow in New York who says it's fine. He says it makes him think of Balsac. That the detail's "marvellous." I quote his exact words.

Levenson was certainly holding out the olive branch with a warmth suggestive of coals of fire. When a man who habitually disregards other people's feelings admits graciously that he may have been "rather hasty," his entire

family, certainly all the female part of it, are bound to meet him nine-tenths of the way, and if, incidentally, he reiterates his original demand, it is fairly safe to surmise that he will encounter much less opposition than he did at first. Leverson, it seemed, in the matter of having his own way with other people, could be persistent. Though himself bereft of any means of moral locomotion beyond that of drifting with the current, he could, when the occasion served, impart a moving force to others who might otherwise have been backward in comprehending the importance of his smaller wishes.

Yet, though she knew she would literally comply with the request, there was something behind the request which she rejected instinctively as soon as she recognized it.

Leverson's mention of "that fellow's" name had brought back the old problem again in full vigor. The warm glow which the reading of the letter had brought to the girl's heart died out as she finished the second and more important part of it. Why had he asked her to do this thing? On its face it was a mere matter of convenience to him. He would be in Brockton himself within twenty-four hours. He would see Thallon himself in any case.

The answer was simple enough. She could not disguise from herself that she was expected to do something more than simply deliver a message. Leverson still believed that it was through her influence that Thallon had chosen other employment. Now, under the encouragement of the New Yorker's favorable comment, Leverson, doubly anxious to reënlist Thallon's services, desired that influence used in an opposite direction.

That she would not, she *could* not do! She tore aside the veil ruthlessly to ask herself why. It would have been easy to convince herself that what she dreaded was the loss of her own respect, for she did dread it; but she knew it was something beyond that which she clung to with such

a curious tenacity. Ever since that day at the Lindleys' she had known with a woman's quick instinct the high place this man had given her in his regard. In those moments of self-condemnation that were frequent with her, she had told herself that she had not deserved it, but it was none the less sweet to her on that account, for she was very human.

Her relationship with Thallon was peculiarly sacred to her, largely because it had stood for that longing within herself for something larger, still more because it was the only part of it to which she had been able to give definite shape, from which she had been able to derive some definite satisfaction. She must, of course, give this up with the rest, but she must give it up unsmeared by any touch of inconsistency. To part from him with the consciousness that he would always look back upon her influence as a stimulant toward something better than he had known before was not easy for her; but it was far easier than such a parting as that, — a self-abasement, an acknowledgment that her lofty counsels had been aimed too high and failed, nay, worse than that, had failed in the first moment of their interference with her own peace.

She could no more have done it than she could have urged Thallon to lie or steal for the sake of making Leverson happy, thereby keeping him sufficiently good-natured to make life with him bearable for her. Now, as always, Leverson's conditions for a better understanding between them seemed fated to contain some clause she could not accept.

She gave up the argument with a sigh, but the sigh was no sign of compromise. A feeling that Leverson was present, and that she was reiterating her denial, was very strong upon her, perhaps because she had read his letter in his study, a room more suggestive of him than any other in the house. She had been reading his written words

seated before the study fireplace with its low basket grate half filled with a few large lumps of soft coal. It was not, of course, used at this season save as a convenient place for burning waste paper.

She noticed now, with some surprise, that it must have been very recently used for that purpose, for the charred remains of burnt paper lay in a compact mass underneath the iron bars. It was hardly possible the servants could have left it so any length of time, yet Levenson had been absent several days, and no one else was supposed to use the room. Her mind, however, was too much on its own train of thought to carry her far in any other direction. She had risen, and, striking a light, held it an instant against the edge of Levenson's letter.

As she watched it burn slowly in her hand, that curious sense that the man himself was in the room watching her grew even stronger, but it brought with it no disquieting sense of doubt, no change in the answer she had made up her mind to give him.

As the loose sheet of note-paper burst suddenly into flame she stooped down and thrust it under the bars. In doing so she displaced the compact mass of burned paper which already lay there. At her touch it fell to pieces with a crackling sound, disclosing below it a packet of closely tied papers which, though charred at one end, were for the rest still untouched by fire. It looked more like a packet of old letters in long envelopes than anything else, for by the light of the burning paper she had thrown beside it she could distinctly read a name—Levenson's own name, written in a large scrawling, but not illiterate hand.

By a quick, instinctive movement, she snatched the packet out of harm's way, though a moment later she could hardly have told why. If, as was evident, the papers belonged to her husband, he had supposedly intended to burn them; and yet, on closer inspection, that simple expla-

nation was not quite so tenable. The papers were tied together in the middle by a band of tape quite untouched by fire, so that, turning them back one by one, Margaret could see the other side. The curious fact which arrested her attention as she did so was that the envelopes were securely sealed; not one of them bore any sign of having ever been opened.

She stood there regarding them curiously, her interest in them at last thoroughly aroused. Ashton Levenson was a very careless man; but he was not, as far as she knew, in the habit of burning letters not only unread, but even unopened. Then, too, they were not letters received by post, for they had neither stamps nor postmark; and the yellow tone of the unburned papers gave the impression that they had been carefully kept for years. She could make no further investigation now, but it was her clear duty to set the papers aside and call the matter to her husband's attention on his return. If her doing so should prove of any use to him, she would be well repaid. There were so few things in which she seemed able to please him nowadays.

By the time she had put the papers into an unused drawer of her own desk upstairs, her mind was back again in its former channel. She had not intended to see Thallon again, her promise to Doniphan debarred her from that; though had she met him through his own choice, or by accident, she would have held firmly to the place she had always held with him. To have been anything else would have wronged him, and where the wrong touched others she had a right to resist. She would, however, go to him to-day and deliver Levenson's message, but in doing so she would make it perfectly clear to him that she held the ground she had always held.

It was no easy matter for her to arrange this in addition to the many other things she had to do. She had only an

hour or two each day now for her own use. To-morrow, the last day of all, she had planned visits to the Lindleys' and the Rectory, followed by a short half-hour at her mother's grave, the only bit of sentiment she had allowed herself.

To-day she had planned to go out to the Hill Farm and say good-by to Mobray Doniphan. She could stop at the hospital and see Thallon on her way back: Mobray, she knew, since his retirement from the Company, was not on the best of terms with Leverson. It was possible she might not see him again.

She worked faithfully until lunch time, superintending a staff of servants who worked well under her because they were not afraid of her. Leverson's four days' absence had calmed the household. Had they known of the impressive domestic phalanx awaiting the family at Newport, they might have been less cheerful.

The drive to the Hill Farm did her good. Though dusty Brockton lay bathed in the heat of late July, the breeze on the higher lands away from the river was cool, almost bracing. She looked back on the wide stretch of valley below as she turned into the long avenue which marked the beginning of Doniphan's possessions.

It was, perhaps, her last sight of it from this unique point of view. Everything she did now seemed to have that stamp upon it. She pulled herself together with an effort. She was fighting vigorously against what she knew to be good, but not the best in herself. The same thing which would have lifted another nature dragged hers down. Her part in life was to be severely practical, its poetry, its tenderness, had been given to others, doubtless because they could make a better use of it.

The sound of the phaeton wheels upon the drive was drowned by the furious barking of Twist, who came bounding out of the wide-open front door as Margaret drove up to the house. The dog's noisy welcome seemed fated to be

her only one, for, having pacified him with a caress, the place seemed to relapse again into dead stillness, its unguarded openness making more marked the sense of desertion which brooded over it.

Even before she passed through the wide-open door she knew Doniphan was not there, for he always kept an eye on the long avenue, and invariably greeted her from the steps of the broad veranda. Nevertheless, she continued on through the wide, cool hall toward the library, partly through force of old habit, partly through a more definite desire to see once more the familiar room as she had seen it scores of times before.

Coming from the glare of sunlight outside, the subdued light within seemed dusky by comparison. The curtains which, in Doniphan's presence, were always thrust aside out of the way, were drawn closely. As she pushed open the door and stood there on the threshold, looking in, a chilly dampness seemed to fall on her, and she shivered slightly.

Small wonder then that she started perceptibly as a tall figure rose from a long steamer chair on the farther side of the table, and stood there for an instant without speaking. The dog was standing mute, but restless, between the two, as if uncertain of the outcome of this unexpected meeting.

She recovered all her serenity at the instant of that recognition; he, on the contrary, retained a certain embarrassment of manner as he advanced toward her. No man living could have guessed that this encounter was fraught with any difficulty for the girl, as she held out her hand in her old frank way. For the moment she had forgotten all about Doniphan and the room, both so predominant a moment before.

"You here!" she cried, in a low voice. "I had not believed it possible! They said you were so much better,

but I would not quite believe it. It was so like Mr. Doniphan to bring you here, — and yet I never dreamed —”

“That I had been so busy getting back to life while you have been so busy getting away from Brockton,” he said, with some suggestion of his old manner about him. “I’m sorry Mr. Doniphan’s out. He went down to one of the labor meetings, — he may be back at any moment. Can’t you wait?”

If his tone hurt her, she did not show it. After all, did she not owe him some explanation for those weeks of silence? Her next words showed that she felt this.

“I am very glad to have this chance of speaking to you. I have sent to inquire often, but until to-day I hardly hoped to see you again before I left Brockton.”

There was something in her voice which moved him, in spite of the close watch he still kept upon himself against assuming anything she had not meant he should. Ever since the day when he had first felt the force of this woman’s personality upon his own, he had held that rein between fingers of wrought steel. His tenure of her friendship, if he could call it such, was short at best; he must do nothing which could mar it in her eyes while it lasted, — so he had told himself, at first. Then had come a revulsion from deep depression to high elation, a defiant inward assertion that do what they would they could not take *that* friendship from him. Doniphan’s confidence in the outcome of the coming struggle with Leverson had (quite against the little man’s intentions) fanned this smouldering sensation of ownership into flame.

“Nor I,” he said slowly, as he took a seat facing her. “Strange that it should have come at the very moment when I was denying myself even the privilege of gratitude — even the commonplace right to thank you and say good-by.”

“You certainly have that,” she returned, still smiling,

those wide, comprehending eyes of hers fixed on his face with that perfect candor which marked the child in her. "I had not thought of your being able to come to me. If you were, why did you not come?"

"Then you did wish it?" he demanded, with a sudden eagerness vibrating beneath the words, despite himself.

"Wish to be thanked? Well, perhaps I did," she returned, with a suggestion of laughter in her voice. "And yet that hardly does me justice either," she went on seriously. "If I had helped you in any way (and I believed I had) I wanted to thank you for letting me do it. It may be more blessed to give than to receive, but sometimes I think the accepting shows the greater generosity, certainly when the gift bestowed consists mostly of good advice. After all, it comes down to that. You have let me lecture you, and I have enjoyed it immensely. That, after all, is what I wanted to thank you for."

"You have asked nothing of me you would not have done yourself ten times over," he returned, with an earnestness which ignored her lighter tone. "I do not mean to imply that the plane on which I stood could have held any temptation for you, but you must have had your own temptations and held them down, or you could not have understood. Until I met you and Dr. Lindley and Mr. Doniphan, life seemed to me merely a great game to be played out with the cards dealt one rather ruthlessly and brutally. My hand, like the great majority, was weak enough, — I could not afford to be fastidious. You know how it was."

She was serious enough now.

"Yes, I think I know," she repeated thoughtfully. "Yet it was a temptation you must not blame others for not seeing as I saw it. It has troubled me since that you may have construed what I said at the time as some reflection on Mr. Leverson's — judgment" (she paused as if she selected

the word carefully). "You must see now that he could not possibly judge you as I did. He was possessed then, and is still possessed, with the idea that he was offering you a fair chance of honorable achievement. To him his own suggestion of the work was the all-important thing. He believes implicitly that the work is really his, — that it will do him great credit, and that incidentally it will be a benefit to you to be employed on it. I had a perfectly frank letter from him this morning, in which he desires me to see you and ask you to renew your engagement with him for the summer. I give you his message just as he sent it. I think you should, if possible, see him yourself in answer to it. He will be at Elmhurst to-night."

She was driving herself through her task with pitiless determination, but she could not, struggle as she would, entirely conceal what it cost her. A warmer color stirred underneath the usually cool, pale face of the girl, her fingers were playing a little nervously with a small bronze paper-weight on the corner of the table beside her. She was not looking at Thallon, as was her way with any one to whom she happened to be speaking. Her eyes were moving restlessly among the familiar objects in the room, but they avoided the chair opposite, where he sat regarding her curiously.

"And you, after all, wish me to do this?"

The question had hardly left his lips before he saw how cruel it was, — all the more cruel because it was quite unnecessary. But the mischief was done. Stupid apologies would not mend matters now. He was punished enough, perhaps, in seeing the reproach in her eyes as she turned them on him, to say what he had forced her to say.

"No," she answered slowly. "Seeing this as I have from the first, from my own point of view, I can't change. Not only that, but I have more reason now than before to believe you can do something better than work for any one

man's amusement, — for to Mr. Levenson all this is merely an amusement, and not even one that is likely to last. Mr. Doniphan has told me of his scheme of buying out the *Transcript*, and that he intended to persuade you to take a place on it before you were hurt. If your engagement with Mr. Levenson was not binding for any definite time, you are, of course, free to accept this."

"I doubt if Mr. Levenson will see it in quite that light. As a matter of fact, he engaged me for a week at our first interview, and has never mentioned the matter since. But that will not prevent his considering I am bound to him. However, let that pass. As you say, I had better see him, and make my position clear. I owe him that even if he had not asked it, — I am still nominally in his employ though M'sieu Dupré has interfered with my going on with the work," Thallon ended, smiling.

"You will find Mr. Levenson is anxious to have you," she admitted honestly. "He told Mr. Doniphan he wanted your help even more now than before the sale of the Works. This message to-day is another proof that he really values you."

"Only another temptation to take the easier path," he said a little grimly, "but, after all, it is not so much of a temptation now. You helped me to put that back of me some time since. I told you so that day at the Doctor's, and I was quite sincere. Nevertheless, I think then the motive of it all was largely to please you. Now I want to tell you I see the reason for it. I can't be worthy of your faith in me in any other way, and I want to be worthy of it for my own sake as well as yours."

"Was that what you wanted to say to me that night at the hospital?" she asked in a low voice.

Curiously enough, considering the disparity between them, this man seemed to have the power of wrapping her completely in himself, even without any set purpose of

doing so. Besides his natural self-assertion, there was an appeal in him she had been quick to see and respond to.

He paused a moment, as if debating something with himself before he answered.

"Yes and no. That is, it was not all I wished to say then, yet it is all I can say now. Of course you can understand why. The changed conditions —"

"Changed! How changed?" she asked, a puzzled look in her eyes.

There were moments when her innocence of life was as wonderful to him as her inherent cleverness — times when the man in him usually took the lead. It must have been that quality in her which had enabled her to live with a man like Leverson two years and not be belittled by it.

"I don't think I exaggerate it," he returned thoughtfully. "In one sense there is perhaps very little difference between our parting now and what our parting would have been then, that is to say, I have no belief, no hope, that I shall see you again after you leave Brockton. Yet there is a difference between the two, — the enormous difference between life and death. A man can say much with the dignity of death behind him which can't be said without bathos in the face of returning strength. At that time, when I believed I was dying, I wanted to tell you something about my past. My hold on it seemed loosening, it was the only thing I had to leave, and I wanted to leave it to you, because, I say it without shame, I thought it would make you think more kindly of me. Now my past has come back to me I cannot give it to you. It becomes at once a part of the present and the future which I have got to live out in my own way. I cannot ask you to read an unfinished story, and that it is unfinished is, after all, your doing, not mine. You told me to live, you know."

She had been leaning toward him with an intense

absorption in his words which she had made no attempt to conceal, but she colored slightly at his last words.

"Ah! then you did understand?" she said.

"Surely of all things that! You thought I was worth it. That was enough for me. It was the key-note of what you had been to me from the first. I asked for you that I might give you something and you came; and the giving was all on your side, as usual. I don't mean I was not loyal in return; every particle of strength in me went out to do your bidding, to please you in that one thing. There was no conscious thought in it, it was merely a sensation, an intense desire, nothing more, and yet it served its purpose."

"But before that—you had not wished to die?" she asked anxiously.

"No! Very far from it. The physical part of me had been fighting desperately for every shred of life, but in that lucid moment when I asked for you, the physical part of me had gone under,—I gave it up then, just as I give you up now, without any hope."

The words had left his mouth before he perceived their import. It was an assertion of possession, a cry of despair, of protest against renunciation of an inherent right. For a moment his hold over himself had slipped. He had risen and walked restlessly across to the great window, with its view of the valley. The curtains had been drawn to keep out the brilliant sunlight. He threw them aside impatiently.

Why should not everything be made clear? The parting had got to come in any case; why should he part from her in silence? The young blood in his veins called out imperiously to have its way. Being a man, he wanted her to know he suffered,—wanted her to suffer with him because it would make it so much easier for him.

The miserable selfishness of it came to him as he turned

and looked at her. She, too, had risen as if to go. Her eyes rested on him with more feeling than he had ever seen in them before, and yet there was reproach in them too.

"You exaggerate the value of my friendship," she was saying in that low voice of hers, — low, yet so marvellously clear and penetrating, like the voices of the great singers. "As such things are given to us to guide, your future certainly rests in your own hands, and I believe, firmly believe, you have found your true work. I put that first because it seems to me such an inestimable blessing. Just think! To have your duty clearly marked out before you. To know that in working out a career you are not merely working for yourself, but for the whole world, — for God." She paused a moment, not in embarrassment, but as if debating with herself how much right she had to speak of what was in her mind. "Some words of yours once caught in my memory," she went on gravely. "Perhaps it is wrong for me even to mention it, for you have just told me you cannot show me your life as once you wished to do. I am far, very far, from wishing to pry into your past, but if by a mere chance word I may have guessed it, — guessed the cause of your bitterness, your lack of faith in yourself, — then surely I may speak. I should like so much to make my last words to you words of real hope."

He was looking at her now in utter bewilderment. The voice was more than kind, yet it was perfectly passionless. It was impossible for him to listen to it and not feel that she was deeply moved, and moved by him. It was equally impossible to question for a moment the reason of it. It was as transparent as the clear depths of her pure eyes.

"You have guessed? You know?" he could only repeat. A flicker of amusement crossed her face like a sunbeam.

"Ah! that is for you to say," she returned demurely.

"You remember that day when they had all gone yachting, and I met you on my way back from the landing with my volume of Longfellow in your hand. You had found it on one of the garden seats and were returning with it to the house."

"And I began reading 'Evangeline' without being asked," he said, smiling back at her.

"No, I think I asked you; but that does not really matter. In a sense you read it very well, but only at the last did it take possession of you; when you got to that line:—

"Might took the place of right, and the weak were oppressed, and the
mighty
Ruled with an iron rod—

Ah! then you read indeed. Why were you so moved by that?"

"The old Notary's story is sad," he said evasively, "and true."

Why was she, of all women, reminding him of the world's injustice and his own loss by it? Could she suspect? The absurdity of the idea came to him almost with its conception. At the moment he would gladly have taken back his old irony, his jibes at human honesty. What did he care, in this hour of parting from her, for the brazen statue levelled by a bolt from heaven. Heaven's interference had come too late to rectify the wrong in that case, and in his. What was the recovery of a name worth to him, who would have bartered his own soul for the right to touch her hair with his hand.

"Yes, very sad," she was saying, "and how true I never knew until I heard the words from your own lips."

She was looking at him now a little shyly, the faint color sweeping back into her face, for she was treading on

dangerous ground; but she had something to say, and she pushed on.

"They were the words of a man who had suffered — grave injustice, so I read them. Tell me, if you may, this one thing, — was I right?"

"You were quite right."

He did not recognize his own voice.

"And had risen above it," she put in with a little note of triumph she could not repress.

"If you mean above revenge, yes."

"I knew it! I knew it!" she broke in vehemently. "That is where you are stronger than I. I am so full of blind resentment, of purposeless reproach. We women are so hemmed in, so helpless. We can only suffer, never rise above suffering into action. So even in my envy of you, you have helped me. The debt is not all on your side."

A light was breaking in upon poor Thallon. She had seen the misery in his eyes, and had misread it because she had never learned the language which spoke in them. It was a language eloquent of the guilt which had burnt itself deep into his soul, smouldering there always, never more than half stifled, ever ready to burst into flame, as it had a moment since. And she — this woman whom he miserably, hopelessly loved — had believed this other thing of him and had cherished it as something noble in him.

Nothing else could have made the position Margaret Leverson held toward him so clear. She cared for him just because he was true to the note she herself had struck. For her sake he had built himself into a new man, and upon her recognition of that new manhood she had founded her implicit faith in him. She not only had the faith; in this hour of parting she believed she had transmitted it to him, as if it were some precious amulet.

And he was bound to let her believe it. It was by far

the simpler way, by far the surest road to her peace of mind, for she would sorrow keenly for him if she knew the truth.

After all, was it not true? true that he had tossed everything else aside, even her friendship, for the sake of being the kind of man she wanted him to be? His failure or success had nothing to do with it. The story ended there, — ended so completely that what he had termed his hopelessness a few moments since seemed wild elation by comparison.

With those earnest words of womanly sympathy she had severed herself from him beyond recall. Until now his thoughts, at least, had been his own. To think of her now in any other than the place she had given herself struck him all at once as a sacrilege. Margaret Levenson had not merely failed to see his weakness, — she was incapable of even conceiving it.

So thought Thallon at the very moment when the woman beside him was crushing the life out of a new-born joy in her heart. How could she help him in any way other than she had, with her "fight on bravely," and then — her — silence. How much harder would it have been for him had he guessed the words of parting which burned those brave young lips for utterance, words infinitely touching even as she had read them months before, had sprung suddenly into new meaning, had clothed themselves with the palpitating life of love incarnate.

Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love!
Think thy thought —

That shall be to-morrow,
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight:

How could he guess, as he looked across at her, the battle that raged behind the quiet face. He only knew she was being taken from him, and that she made no outcry.

"Please don't think ill of me if I have lacked your courage," he said slowly. "I've no doubt things will come out right — as they do in novels — in the end. I shall reap a harvest scribbling for the papers, and then —"

"Yes, — yes, I am sure of it," she said, coming a step nearer to him in her eagerness, "a harvest of great thoughts wisely spoken — of firm purposes, high standards — all possible to the brave and true, — and I shall know and be very proud of you."

He kept down by sheer force of will the passionate cry that rose to his lips. How could anything stand between them if she only knew, — if she only cared?

Words, thoughts at least, like these surged through his brain, not singly, but in an angry torrent that threatened to break into articulate speech against his utmost striving; yet what he said was: —

"I will at least be true. I'm not so sure about the other, but thank you none the less for your belief in it. Only one thing more. From my first meeting with you, Mrs. Leverson, you have helped me always; you are helping me now in another way. I can't grasp all your belief in the coming good, but I believe in you and what you have been to me, and that's everything."

She met his eyes fearlessly, though there was pain in hers.

"I believe the supreme test is looking beyond ourselves," she went on steadily; "that is why we can help each other so much better than we can help ourselves."

"Yes, I know; we grow through giving."

"And gain through giving even what we give," she put in, smiling a little sadly. "My faith is always strongest when I preach."

"Then you, too, have felt the need of faith in yourself?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Say rather faith in God. I have looked too closely at myself to see the ultimate good."

"Well, perhaps it will come to us both," he said, with deep feeling. "Our worlds will lie very far apart, Mrs. Leverson, but I, at least, have come nearer to some such faith through you; I shall never forget it. Good-by!"

"Then I shall not see you to-night?"

His face flushed at her words, but the color died out of it again instantly.

"Not as I see you now. To me this is our real parting," he said slowly. "I shall never forget you, Mrs. Leverson."

"Nor I you," she said, with one of her brightest smiles; "but I shall keep my last good advice for to-morrow. To-day it is not good-by at all, for I have, and you must have, great faith in to-morrow."

He took the hand she held out to him, but resisted the passionate impulse to raise it to his lips. He dared not trust himself to speak again.

Even though all light went out of the room with her, surely she had left behind her some subtile fragrance. When he turned back into the house, there was joy in the midst of his sorrow, for he had known her. Even if life ended for him with the going down of the sun this day, he had lived and loved her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT ODDS

MOBRAY DONIPHAN, always irregular in the matter of hours, was even less considerate than usual in this respect on the night which followed Margaret's visit to the Hill Farm.

After a pretence of supper, Owen Thallon was again restlessly pacing the study, pausing now and then at the deeply recessed window to look out at the leaden pall of cloud that had long since blotted out the sinking sun and was now blotting out the valley and the river.

A sensation of unrest — a dull, yet anxious anticipation, as of an impending crisis — had fastened itself upon him. Despite the heat of the day the night air struck chill into the room, and he closed the long window hastily, as if he would shut out some of his own forebodings. Yet he neither drew the heavy curtains, nor called for lights, but, with eyes fixed on the cold glass, stared out into the night, held there by some strange fascination stronger than his will.

He claimed no credit for the frail hold by which he had maintained the mastery of himself that afternoon. Nothing but a woman's unsullied purity had saved him from his own weakness, and he knew it only too well. Was he strong enough even now to hold to a shadow of his old relation with her, and hold it gratefully, — not for an hour or a day, but for a lifetime? How far had she guessed, and how far had she favored it? Would she sanction, if she knew, the path he had chosen that afternoon as the

only possible one for him to follow? No! She who had shown no sign of weakness would not call it weak, as Doniphan had done. She would understand.

Of the several forces working upon him he was, at the moment, most at odds with that personified in Doniphan, whose coming he was awaiting with a strange mixture of desire and dread. What right, when all was said, had this man, in the guise of a benefactor, to force upon him an additional temptation? If he were willing to part from her in silence, what more could he be asked to do?

Yet Doniphan had asked a great deal more; had asked him to assume a position which, it seemed to Thallon, would render further silence impossible, because it would call down upon his head, not her forgetfulness, but her contempt. How, to her, could he ever afterwards appear as anything but the self-seeking fortune-hunter who had accepted Ashton Levenson's bread and salt to betray him. The betrayer's legal rights or wrongs would be as nothing to her. She was a woman; she would know only that Ashton Levenson had suffered at his hands, and that would be enough. The man who had wronged her for years would turn out a martyr at the last, and he, Thallon—! No; he could not, he would not, do it.

He knew now why his perseverance in his original purpose had begun to waver weeks ago. The growth of years had been thrust aside under the influence of a stronger passion.

And this overmastering thing was what Doniphan had undertaken to combat, and would combat, as mercilessly, bereft of any taint of grossness, as if it were the lowest form of selfishness. With Doniphan the insistent question was not whether it were generous, but whether it were right.

The young man's whole nature, and the best in it, rose in revolt at the mere thought. What he had to give he

had earned by years of self-denial. He had worked for this one end that he might dedicate it to a dead woman's memory; and now he actually grasped it between his fingers, they ached to lay it at the feet of another woman on the altar of a stronger love. Right or wrong, who was this man that he should decide for him in this? In anything else, perhaps, yes. In this, no; a thousand times no!

How long he sat there he never knew,—a soul in struggle takes no note of time; but nothing roused him until the entrance of Doniphan's housekeeper with the study lamp. Mrs. Weatherby's flood of light and cheerful conversation was not a thing to be ignored.

"Dear me!" she ejaculated; "but you quite gave me a turn, Mr. Thallon, you did really. I'd no idea you were here, as how should I so long after your usual hour, with Mr. Doniphan not yet come, and the rain beginning. Such a night, and him not to be counted on with any certainty between this and midnight. Your room's been ready this half-hour, for it's well past eight already."

The tall figure of the Secretary had detached itself from the deep shadow of the window and had moved into the circle of light; moved hastily, a quick, impatient motion of the hand enjoining silence, the head bent slightly, as if listening.

"He's coming now," he said quickly. "Hold the light, will you? Hurry, please."

He had reached the hall as he spoke, and the smiling Weatherby, following breathlessly in his wake, got there just in time to find her master swinging open the great front door, only closed again by the united efforts of both men against a great gust of rain-soaked wind.

"Hard night," Doniphan remarked, panting a little, but with a ring of enjoyment in his voice as he slowly unbuttoned a dripping mackintosh. "Hard night on horses,

but good enough for the average man. I'm glad you waited up for me; I want to talk to you."

"And dinner!" Mrs. Weatherby put in parenthetically, from the study doorway.

"Right in now. I only require a touch of soap and water and shan't stop to dress. I won't be five minutes."

He disappeared upstairs two steps at a time, Thallon watching him in silence from below.

Despite his friendliness, the younger man thought he had surprised a certain constraint in Doniphan's manner. Perhaps all this cheerfulness was intended to conceal it. Thallon rejected the idea almost as soon as it occurred to him. His own morbid fancy was getting the better of him—painting on other men's faces his own thoughts. And yet there was certainly a suppressed excitement in Doniphan somewhat at variance with his words. He had the light of victory in those sharp, black eyes of his. Or were his high spirits merely the result of battle with the storm outside?

The storm had indeed broken with sudden fury. Thallon—trying the fastenings of the heavy door—could see through the small diamond panes on either side of it the giant willows below the house bending low under the whistling wind. Far down in the valley the usual lights of Brockton were blotted out by a curtain of slanting rain. He turned and walked slowly into the great dining room across the hall, thinking hard.

The dark curtains of the room had been closely drawn, and the lamp in the centre of the white cloth filled the place with a warm glow not unwelcome after that glance outside. Mrs. Weatherby, bustling in and out with mysterious covered dishes, failed not with her usual running accompaniment of comment, quite indifferent as to her possession of a listener. This quality in Weatherby suited Doniphan extremely well. The sound of a cheerful human

voice always pleased him, especially when he was too pre-occupied to know what it was saying.

"I'm that thankful he's got home," she remarked briskly, as she adjusted a silver cover over a smoking platter of chops. "Just think of a night like this and him with no more sense than a baby. What's the use of book-learning if you don't know enough to change your clothes when you're wet through, as I've told Mrs. Faucon to her face. He wouldn't be doing it now if it wasn't for me, — not alone through laying 'em out on his bed, but going up and calling to him through the door to remind him."

Mrs. Weatherby's eloquence here came to a sudden pause through the entrance of the person described, who, thanks to her motherly care, appeared as dry as an old bone, and rather suggestive of one in face and figure.

Doniphan dispensed with Mrs. Weatherby's further services, and all ceremony, with a deprecating wave of his thin hand.

"Don't come till I ring," was all he vouchsafed that devoted woman, as she disappeared with the silver cover and a promptness born of long training. "Please sit down," he went on, turning to Thallon. "You look ill; are you worse?"

The younger man shook his head with a touch of impatience. "I haven't waited for you to tell you that," he said, with an abruptness almost rude. "I waited because I knew you'd have something to tell me."

Doniphan's long fingers were moving busily amongst the dishes placed within easy reach of them. He had seated himself opposite the chair he had indicated to Thallon with a motion of his hand. For the first time since his entrance he now glanced at his companion across the table, though he did not pause in his meal to do so.

"Yes, I have; but the news is not all on one side. Margaret Leverson has been here this afternoon."

"Then you've seen her."

"For a moment only, but it was enough for that. She told me she had met you here, and from the way she told me I knew you'd behaved like a man, though there's nothing strange in that; I knew you would."

The voice softened strangely, though his eyes were no longer on Thallon, but were occupied in a minute inspection of a bottle of curry. Thallon responded at once to the other's tone.

"I couldn't go through it again," he said.

"O dear me, yes, you could," Doniphan put in with instant tartness. "And don't, for Heaven's sake, get it into your head that you deserve any consideration for it, either. For behaving like a man (which I use in place of the much-abused word 'gentleman') Margaret owes you no thanks. You could have done no less, even for your own sake. But this other matter is different; that requires some strength."

"You mean under these changed conditions to pursue my original purpose as to Leverson?" Thallon spoke slowly; his lips were strangely dry.

"Most assuredly. How have conditions changed in any way except by your own choosing, and a choice, at that, against your own sane judgment. Come, come, my dear fellow, you've made an error; you must choose again in better accord with that judgment, and bring back conditions to where they were before."

An angry flush had sprung to Thallon's face, markedly pale before. If he had staggered an instant under Doniphan's sudden attack, he rallied almost instantly.

"Chosen!" he said with bitter emphasis, "a choice between the loss of her respect on one side and the keeping it through a life of poverty and struggle on the other. Yes, — if there be any choice, then I've chosen."

Doniphan laid down his knife and fork a minute to look

at him. If he had any latent pity for him, he had no intention of showing it just then.

"It might have occurred to you that breaking away from her under such conditions would be the best for her and for you ; but that, after all, is beside the question. Granted that your renunciation of an old ambition has become the easy rather than the difficult thing to do, the inquiry remains, 'Is it right?' I for one say, 'No.' I for one say you cannot give up the position for which you've worked, and rightly worked, these last three years merely because you fancy you love a woman you have no right to love. That's what our friend Lindley would call 'drivel.'"

Was he pressing him too hard? If Doniphan's object was to rouse his adversary into the carelessness of anger, he had, perhaps, overshot the mark. Thallon was certainly angry, but he was quite collected. If he fell back now on an argument far too obvious to have escaped Doniphan's attention, it was more because he wanted to know the full strength of Doniphan's position than because of any special faith in it.

"I think we discussed that view of the case this morning," he said slowly. "It is not of paramount importance, because if I had all the will in the world to claim the Leverson money, I have as yet no power to do so. Why quarrel with me for not wishing to go to Ashton Leverson without a shred of legal proof, only to be laughed at for my pains? You know the man."

Despite a not unnatural sense of injury which rankled after Doniphan's last words, — despite his angry determination to hold to his present purpose and reject any dictation on the part of this curious man, — it was an added pain to Thallon that in doing so he risked the loss of a friendship which only yesterday had stood between him and death. He was never for an instant unconscious of this as he went on. Could he but win him over to his own

side! But his last attempt had not been very successful. It seemed to have amused Doniphan.

"That was hardly the line of argument you took with me this morning," the little man said, smiling wickedly. "You considered then you had sufficient hold over him to dictate terms as to his treatment of his wife (a proposition not in the best of taste, if you'll excuse my saying so). May I ask if your position's any weaker now?"

"No weaker and no stronger. I have a shadow of title by which I might hope to make some terms with him in her interests, none in my own. I found you in desperate straits, racked with anxiety about her. I offered to throw my secret into the scale for what it is worth — nothing more. I never claimed to have legal proof."

If there was anything in this appeal that touched Doniphan, he did not show it. He had pushed aside his empty plate (having evidently enjoyed his dinner), and was slowly pouring out a cup of the blackest Java ever brewed in Brockton. He put the coffee-pot back on the spirit lamp at his elbow with ominous deliberation.

"I've got legal proof enough," he remarked icily.

There was something in the tone in which he said it as relentless as the whistling of the wind outside. The words were hardly out before a clap of thunder seemed to shake the old house to the foundation. Doniphan got up, walked over to the window deliberately, and looked out. Thallon followed him, his square jaw set hard.

"From that woman?" he demanded hoarsely.

Doniphan nodded without turning.

"Yes; why didn't you tell me about her, it would have saved time. I only learned to-day of Jane Kirk's strange reception of you on your advent at Elmhurst. Why didn't you follow that up?"

"I did. I knew she had concealed evidence. My hand was almost on it weeks ago, when she veered like the

wind under other influence. Then I gave it up for a time."

"Humph! Also under other influence. Well, it comes to the same thing; I got it out of Lindley."

"Lindley?"

"Why, yes. He had it, oddly enough, from Leverson himself, — but that was a mere coincidence. My object in going to the Doctor was, in the first place, his being my only reliable witness of John Leverson's death. And it was, as it turned out, quite opportune. It seems he and Smalls have been studying Jane Kirk's case for some days past at Leverson's request. They were just starting for Elmhurst when I reached Lindley's. I joined them."

"Dr. Lindley could tell you nothing new," Thallon put in positively. "He had no suspicion of any written evidence."

"That is to say, he did not suspect its importance. Very likely; Lindley's not suspicious naturally, but he's got a memory for detail. For instance, he remembered that, in addition to the telegram sent Leverson through Miss Laurie, there was a letter, quite a long letter, written him by the dying man."

Doniphan had resumed his seat at the table and had poured himself out another cup of coffee. His touch of annoyance seemed to have passed, leaving him provokingly cool again. As much could hardly have been said of Thallon. From his place just inside the circle of light he followed Doniphan's words with breathless interest.

"When we got to the house we found Randal Whitelaw waiting for us," Doniphan went on. "I think we understand each other pretty well. I made some playful references to the sanctity of the United States mail which he seemed to enjoy. I as good as said, 'I've found you out. You're a thief,' and he as good as answered, 'Prove it,' after which we got on nicely. My own idea is he has

other sources of information than your valise. What do you suppose they are?"

Thallon shook his head.

"Not Miss Laurie, surely?"

"Not unless he wrung it out of her. However, that's immaterial. He was there, blessed with as much information as I had, and as keenly on the scent. I hadn't been in the house five minutes before I found out why."

"From him?"

For the first time that night Doniphan chuckled.

"O dear, no! From Mrs. Levenson. On our arrival she came downstairs dressed for driving,—was on her way to the station to meet Ashton. She looked pale, and, as I thought, worried. The medical men went into the long drawing-room to wait, while Whitelaw went upstairs to prepare Miss Laurie for their coming. He has, I believe, some legal oversight of the case. I took Mrs. Levenson into the room Ashton calls his study. The girl needed somebody to help her; besides which I saw she had something to say, something, as it shortly transpired, of supreme importance to us."

So far Doniphan had told his story with the same leisurely precision with which he sipped his coffee. To the waiting man it seemed as if the speaker were slowly weaving a net about his own freedom of will. No mesh left the weaver's fingers untested.

"This morning Mrs. Levenson found a packet of papers in the fireplace of Ashton's study," Doniphan went on, "a packet apparently of old letters tied together in the middle by a bit of tape, and slightly charred at one end. Some one had evidently tried to burn it, but had been interrupted and left the work unfinished. She had rescued it, and before going out in the afternoon locked it securely in a drawer of her desk, intending to give it to Levenson on his return. When she got back it was gone. After

I parted with Mrs. Leverson, who was overdue at the station, I went upstairs to have a look at this piece of furniture, the flimsy kind of a thing made of veneer and varnish which women call a desk. The entire back of it was held in place by half a dozen screws. By the way, did you ever see a woman use a screw-driver?"

Thallon never had.

"I have! Mrs. Weatherby takes up carpets with one. They always use it as if they were filling teeth. The heads of these screws were all badly scratched and two of them broken, — very recent breaks. In putting the thing back none of them had been completely driven home."

"Jane Kirk?"

"Who else? Celeste has a firmer hand, and Miss Laurie no hands at all, only a brain. I knew then why the doctors were kept waiting downstairs. Their arrival had been inopportune. Randal Whitelaw and Miss Laurie were not yet quite through with Jane Kirk, though twelve hours before they had thought they were. Handicapped as she is, she had outwitted them all at the last moment. Well, if I wanted to help her I had small time to do it in. I could hear several persons moving in the room above, and stepped to the heavy portière, which hung across Mrs. Leverson's door, to listen. I hardly knew what I was waiting for, — at the moment I was impelled rather by instinct than reason, — but I had not long to wait."

It had begun to dawn on Thallon that Mobray Doniphan could, after all, tell a story. A moment since his listener had found himself amused despite his racking anxiety; now he found himself thrilled with an excitement quite beside his personal interest in the outcome. It was the same scene in which he had pictured himself as the chief actor time and time again when he had first come to Brockton. Had Doniphan any purpose in bringing it all

back to him — he did not pause to ask himself just then ; Doniphan was speaking again.

“Some one was coming down the stairway which almost directly faced the door, the light step of a woman and the rustle of a woman’s skirts. She came on cautiously, as if she knew she was being watched, as she doubtless was from above, passed within a yard of where I stood, then back down the corridor toward Ashton’s dressing-room. I waited where I was until I saw Celeste was following her, then I slipped back to the communicating door between the two rooms, a much shorter passage than through the hall. She was, however, already in the room, had just leaned across the bed as if to snatch something from beneath the pillow, when she caught sight of Celeste through the open doorway. I suppose the shock of her discovery was the last straw, the one thing needed to completely upset the woman’s tottering reason. I shall never forget the cry she gave as she shrank into the farthest corner of the room, snarling and frothing. Whitelaw had staked a little too much on his last cast, for I was the first person in the room, and before I helped to lift her on to the bed I had the packet in the breast pocket of my coat.”

Doniphan tapped the spot lightly with his long forefinger as if to emphasize the assertion, but he appeared in no hurry to produce this trophy of the chase. Thallon could stand the strain no longer.

“You had no knowledge then of what you had found?”

“No; but I was absolutely certain. The direction on the outside envelope was in John Levenson’s hand. Lindley identified it as we drove home. The rest of it (as I found out looking it over with him by the light of my carriage lamp) consisted of several letters addressed by Andrew Murray to a Miss Thallon in Belle Plain, Iowa, in 1865, and numerous post-office receipts for money sent by this Miss Thallon to the firm of Murray & Warner up to

the year 1883. Oh, the thing's complete! The last must have been in Miss Laurie's hands up to John Levenson's death. How much longer we can't say."

"And you read these papers, none of which were directed to you, one of which was directed to Ashton Levenson?"

Doniphan's eyes snapped.

"Most assuredly. Miss Laurie, or her agent, had already tried to destroy them once. Levenson might or might not follow suit. I, for one, wouldn't trust him. It was no time for squeamishness, and I had my reward. You could ask nothing more of the Levenson letter; it's a full confession. He entreats Ashton to find you at all costs."

"Then you were right! He had not ignored! He had not forgotten! Let me see for myself."

The hand which Thallon stretched out shook perceptibly, the face was haggard with suppressed emotion.

There was an answering light in the elder man's eyes. He was not unmoved, and was moreover far too sharp not to see that he had touched a spring in the other man's character which might prove useful to him. He had already drawn a small bundle of papers from that breast pocket and was holding it toward Thallon across the table, a packet tied in the middle by a bit of tape, and slightly charred at one end.

He relapsed into discreet silence while Thallon tore off the frayed string and ran his eyes hungrily over the written words.

"He seems to have trusted Ashton completely," the younger man said presently, as he laid down the yellow, crumbling paper.

"Very foolish of him."

Thallon glanced at the speaker rather quizzically: "I understood you yesterday as maintaining some sort of faith in Levenson. You spoke then as if it would be

quite safe to trust him. Didn't you say something to that effect?"

"I said he would not lie, and that he would stick to an agreement if one could be forced on him, and I say so now. As yet it's not necessary for him to lie, nor has any agreement been forced on him. If you once give him the chance to trample down what he will consider an attack upon his rights, you'll find him capable of doing it."

"I'm not so sure of that. Remember that in this way Ashton Leverson has not yet been tested. Miss Laurie did not dare to test him, and she knew him better than you do. A man above lying is not likely to steal."

"He would not regard it as stealing. Three years ago he might have settled with you honestly, without compulsion; but not since he's touched the pitch of speculation and felt the itch of the gambler, and a crooked one at that. The man is buried to the neck in obligations; anything short of your complete surrender means his ruin. Bargain with him as you please, but don't go to him with the one written proof of your case in your right hand and a pleasant form of compromise on your lips. It's dangerous."

"As far as the money goes I've no desire to compromise."

"Just as I thought. You'll throw that away and with it all chance of doing anything with him. You'll do it thinking you're protecting her, just as you thought you were protecting her when you threw Dupré on to your own track, and a sweet mess you made of *that*!"

The hot color had rushed to Thallon's face.

"Who told you that?" he demanded angrily.

"Margaret Leverson herself."

Perhaps Doniphan's thrust struck nearer home than he had meant it should. The younger man was leaning heavily against the table, his face gone white again, as he asked, "Who told her?"

"Reggie, I believe."

Doniphan was positively brutal. He ignored the anxiety in the other man's tone; his own heart was in this passage of arms.

"Does she know of Levenson's connection with the case?"

"O dear, no. Reggie managed to keep that much from her. He only told her about you because he wanted to make an interesting deathbed scene. That sort of thing makes me ill."

"You can hardly blame me for it."

"It could hardly have happened without you. However, that can't be helped now. What I want to prevent is anything more like it. To go back to Levenson, you won't see him until he's seen Whitelaw. He's in this too; don't forget that."

"How did you part from him?"

"Oh, I met him fairly. When the excitement had subsided and the two physicians had driven away with their charge (obviously no longer safe at Elmhurst), he turned to me in that consummately cool way of his and asked me if Mrs. Levenson had recovered her lost property. 'Ash-ton's,' I corrected pleasantly, 'some old letters sent him three years ago and miscarried. Jane Kirk had hidden them, it seems, here in this room. I have them safe now; make your mind quite easy, I'll see he gets them.'"

"How could you promise that? The papers may be directed to Levenson, but they contain a secret which belongs to me."

Thallon's voice was harsh and abrupt. He spoke rapidly, his eyes fixed on Doniphan. If Doniphan, absorbed in his narrative, had forgotten for a moment the latent opposition lurking in a square, set jaw, the other's tone reminded him of it now. He met it more than halfway.

"Ah! But does it altogether?" he asked, smiling. "I think I disputed that this morning with more or less plausi-

bility. Since then I may have earned an additional right to enter my protest against your throwing away this inheritance. I might remind you I've just put it into your hands at some little risk and inconvenience to myself. Of course, I see how you look at it. You think if you do this thing without her knowledge, — if you compromise with Ashton to his advantage and to hers, — you are doing the magnanimous, the unselfish, thing. I tell you you have no right to compromise with evil or be magnanimous toward a swindle, and you know well she would not accept it at your hand if she knew."

"She must never know! I forbid you to tell her!"

Doniphan's eyes glittered disagreeably. The dictatorial side of him was at the moment uppermost, and it was chafed cruelly by that one small offensive word. He was painfully aware that here he was not dealing with the graceful Reggie, but with a man who, whatever else he lacked, did not lack decision. The hard level of his voice was not intended to conceal his sneer as he remarked: —

"That's strong language, but accepting it without comment, what then? Supposing no one else tells her, which is supposing a good deal, and that I obey you, which as yet is not quite settled? You renounce what two months since was your high ambition. You relinquish the cleansing of your mother's memory from the slur of a secret marriage under an assumed name, disregard the dying wish of the man who wronged her, that his injustice should be righted. What then, Owen Leverson?"

Doniphan had seen his first stroke tell as he watched the deadly white face before him. He followed up his advantage mercilessly as he fastened the name upon him.

"And you accomplish all this for what? Ashton Leverson settles into respectable affluence. Margaret accepts her lot with proper resignation. Randal Whitelaw and the Colonel reap a rich harvest under the wing of the Great

Combine. Every one worth considering is happy, and poor little Brockton goes to the devil. The only trouble with it all is that poor little Brockton happens to be right, and you — all wrong."

"I don't quite follow you."

"Well, perhaps I can make it clearer. I had it from Whitelaw a week or so ago, at the time when the stars in their courses were inclined to the side of the ungodly, that if the Trust had any difficulty with their hands the Brockton Works would be moved to Harrisburg without a moment's compunction. Perhaps you don't know what that means. If you want to know, go and look at Therlow, the place where they dismantled the Works four years ago. It used to support five thousand people, — it's a howling wilderness now. And what does it mean in Brockton? not merely that Lindley's scheme and mine for the decent housing of some five or six hundred women and children goes up in smoke, — that would be only the relinquishment of any hope of betterment, — but the taking from them the homes they've got. In short, the death blow to a miserable little town, which with all its faults is yet not quite on a level with Sodom and Gomorrah. Meanwhile the place you ought to occupy stands empty, and the men who are gambling with your money play the merry game to the end. When they make that last move they will be met by riot and murder, for the class we work for can always be counted on to put itself in the wrong. And who will care? Not Whitelaw nor the Colonel nor Leverson. They will be provided for out of your bounty, not Margaret, — for she will never hear of it, — but the stain of it will lie at your door."

The voice was low pitched, yet every word was terribly distinct. He had extended a long forefinger, like some merciless index, at the man he arraigned, as if he were probing into the deepest depths of conscious motive.

Down into the hidden places of a conscience he himself had had his share in building up, Mobray Doniphan pushed forward what he claimed as his higher right. Could Thallon defeat that purpose with the assertion that love came first? Doniphan must have seen it coming, for his next words answered it.

"You are not even giving this thing up for her sake, but for your own. You do not dare to take your rightful place for fear she will misunderstand your motives. And if she did, is that the worst thing that could happen in heaven or earth? Your whole attitude turns on your secret consciousness that the girl loves you. You will give her up, but not that belief, — anything but that!"

A great light had come into the other man's face.

"It is true," he said slowly; "anything else; but that — never!"

"You will not put it into my hands to explain to her?"

"No; I will not strike him through her. I am going to Elmhurst to-night; I shall see him and force a promise from him for her protection. Beyond that I shall exact nothing. You have just said that anything else meant ruin to him, and I know it, for I know his affairs well. I can't ruin him, I can't ruin her own father, and then go to her and tell her I did it because it was the right thing to do. I don't believe it is right; but if I did believe so, I shouldn't do it."

"And you still hold to your threat if she learns the truth and breaks with him?"

"She's not likely to learn the truth and break with him; but if she ever does, my threat, as you call it, holds good, and more than good."

Doniphan paused a moment to think.

"I advise you not to go there to-night; better think this over. Wait until to-morrow, at least."

That he put it in the form of a request surprised even Doniphan himself.

"I can't wait. They expect me to-night; they leave to-morrow. Besides, Whitelaw may act — put Leverson on guard — ruin everything."

"Well, this is my last word. Take a copy of the papers, not the originals. You are dealing with men under great temptation."

Thallon smiled. "There again I'm only agreeing with you. He has his limits, as you've said. I'll risk his playing fair if only because I've nothing to lose I care for."

He was, as he spoke, gathering together the papers, which lay scattered on his side of the table. Doniphan's voice shook slightly in spite of his best endeavors.

"They're yours to do with as you like," he returned slowly, "even if it parts us."

He turned, walked toward the door, his head bent. When he got to it he stopped abruptly.

"If you're going to Elmhurst to-night, I'll order the carriage," he said sharply. "You know well enough it's no night for you to go three miles afoot."

Thallon sprang toward him, his face aglow.

"You will forgive me!" he cried hoarsely.

"No hysterics," Doniphan retorted, his hand on the door. "If you loved the girl half as well as I do, you'd love some other things still more. However, let me know at breakfast how you come out. I'm still interested in the romance, though it's not ending happily."

For the first time in his life Doniphan went out of that room with a sense of defeat strong upon him.

CHAPTER XXXV

MARGARET SENDS A MESSAGE

THE late afternoon was fading into early evening an hour before its time, when Margaret Leverson drove out through the Elmhurst gates, bound for the station.

Though the storm had not yet broken, the wind had freshened perceptibly, driving before it a scud of ragged gray mist. The harsh cry of a wild duck as he sped towards the shelter of the river marshes in the gathering darkness sustained the sense of expected strain and stress in the air about her.

Margaret drew up the window of the brougham less because she felt the chill of the night air, than because she wanted to shut out the troubled world outside, wanted to be alone with her own thoughts during these last few moments she could call her own.

Doniphan, with all his shrewdness, had misinterpreted the underlying cause of that strained look in her face. The mysterious loss of the little packet had, it is true, for the moment startled her, but more because it accentuated that sensation that she was watched, than because she had attached to the loss itself any special importance. The true cause of her unrest lay much deeper, in the storm-tossed depths of her own soul. For the first time in her life she dreaded observation; for the first time in her life she was conscious of having something to conceal.

She leaned wearily back on the soft cushions of the carriage and tried to think it out. Two sharply contending

forces had been struggling for the mastery within her these many hours, and although she believed that the ultimate victory lay with the force of duty, inclination was dying very hard. Even as she forced it down and trampled on it, it rose again, subtilely tempting, insistent, utterly refusing to be set aside.

It was always the same, this vision which had come to a girl of twenty, this vision of what she might have had *if she had only known*. It typified itself in a face — young like her own, but very strong in its square masculine lines. Though her mind was conjuring up an endless procession of faces, — the Rector's, Doniphan's, Levenson's, — this one face forced itself before them all relentlessly.

It would be useless for her to close her eyes to the subtile, intangible change that had come to her since she had risen that morning. It was there, do what she would ; it was there even if, as far as lay within the power of her will, she blotted out all vestige of that wild elation which had sprung into her heart on her first recognition of it. Had she indeed eaten of the tree of knowledge, and must she surely die as the penalty of a moment's joy?

The hot blood rushed to her face as she remembered that joy, not contrition, had marked that first moment of awakening. And even after that, there had been in the midst of the great struggle the insistent question — what harm could it do to her? this knowledge that she, with the light of youth in heart, might have loved and been loved like other women and been supremely happy.

Yes, though her lips had been silent, her face calm, that he, in very shame, might not see, her soul had toyed with the temptation before it had risen to do battle with it.

It had come over her in a great wave of feeling, even before she had touched his hand at parting, that this man loved her. All differences between them, differences of

temperament, station, ties of blood, bonds of duty, had vanished into thin air in that one instant of time.

And was it enough now that she had regained her hold upon the last? Had that moment's breaking down of a soul's defences left behind it merely a temptation to be resisted, or a sin to be expiated? Could it find lodgement for one hour and leave her what she had been before? Could it have come to her at all, had she been what she had always thought herself to be?

Her keenest anguish was for the past, not for the future. Her pride — her womanhood — would help her there. She knew well what she had to do. Never in her whole life had she clung more tenaciously to her woman's sense of duty than in the moment of her admission that save for that duty she might have found happiness and love.

She was feverishly anxious to take up the broken thread of her life, to sacrifice every selfish wish, to devote every particle of strength left in her, to the service of her husband. As she drove on in the gathering dusk she forced herself to think of the future, yearning hungrily to find fresh opportunity for expiation. She longed now to leave Brockton for good and all, as ardently as a few short hours before she had clung to it. It seemed to her as she looked back over her life that Ashton had, after all, asked very little of her. Oh, he should see, he should see!

Even the sudden stoppage of the brougham hardly roused her from her abstraction, not, at least, until it was supplemented by a voice of rather warm expostulation from the box seat.

She was surprised to note, on glancing out of the window, that they had not yet entered Brockton. It seemed hours to her since she had left Elmhurst. Her mind came back to the present in a bound. She let down the side window and looked out, her eyes taking a confused impression of a plunging horse and a tall figure at the bridle, which, in

the indistinctness of the gloom and the drifting mist might have been either man or woman.

The voice of Thomas was raised in something more than polite protest, tempered only by the presence of his mistress.

"I want ter see him, I tell ye, an' I will too, ef I was ter hang fer it," a woman's voice retorted defiantly.

Margaret was entirely herself again as she grasped this new necessity for action. She demanded to know the cause of the interruption in a tone which admitted of no trifling. Thomas, perhaps, felt some of the embarrassment of helpless innocence.

"She's a mill hand, Mrs. Leverson, by the look of her," he said, peering into the gloom, "an' gone stark mad I should say by the actions of her. Hi! say, let go, will you?" he went on, changing his manner again as he addressed the persistent phantom. "Let go, or I can't hold the hoss, an' if I don't you'll be gittin' hurt, you will!"

Margaret opened the carriage door, leaning slightly forward for a better view. She had not been able to catch the phantom's words, but the threatening quality of the tone had not escaped her. She still carried the recollection of that scene in the main street of Brockton the day of Meyer's triumph. There was the same accent of intense hatred in this voice. Was it directed at her now, as it had been then, because she was Ashton Leverson's wife? If so, she was bound to listen to its complaint patiently. She had just been asking to do or suffer something for him; perhaps she was being answered already.

"What is it?" she asked quietly. "I think I heard my name. I am Mrs. Leverson; can I do anything for you?"

The words had an instant effect upon the defiant figure at the horse's head. To begin with, it loosed its hold and moved quickly toward Margaret, where the light from the side lantern fell full upon it. Margaret started as

she recognized Louise Dupré, though she was changed, strangely changed, since she had last seen her.

"Yes, 'tis," she remarked, as she scanned Margaret's face deliberately. "I never reckoned to see ye agin, but it turns out so. 'Twasn't you I wanted, but him. Where is he?"

"Are you speaking of Mr. Levenson?" Margaret asked, much puzzled. She knew enough of the girl's story to know she was wanted by the Brockton police as a witness against her father. Her disappearance was universally ascribed to her unwillingness to be used for that purpose in the hands of a shrewd district attorney. This search for Levenson might have something to do with that.

"Yes, it's him," the girl retorted impatiently. "I can't put it no plainer, can I? I've got ter see him right away; it's a matter of life and death, I tell you."

Although Margaret was not disposed to attach too much importance to this last assertion, the girl's suffering was obvious. She instantly recalled Antoine Dupré's visit to Elmhurst and his desire to enlist Levenson's aid in his search for his daughter. Why this persistent linking of her husband's name with these people's misery and shame, both so completely foreign to him, so entirely outside his range of vision. She, Margaret, had felt so bitterly against Dupré for his cowardly crime, and yet it had been the means of drawing her closer to — God's mercy! how everything dragged her back to that, even in the midst of this still greater misery that should have lifted her above herself.

Poor Louise Dupré was very far from understanding the gentleness which softened Margaret's next words.

"Child, child, do not seek him with any hope of bettering your father's condition or your own," she said, laying that expressive hand of hers on the girl's arm with an infinite tenderness. "He cannot possibly help you. He has no influence, and could not honestly use it if he had."

Louise Dupré drew away the arm with an angry ges-

ture. Her lips curled scornfully, her eyes had a curious glitter in them, under the flickering light of the carriage lamp. The wind was lashing some stray locks of her black hair against her face, and a drop or two of the coming rain struck it spitefully, but she winced at neither. Her look was fixed on the other woman's face in a cold, hard stare.

"Well, ye beat me!" she began, with slow scorn. "Ye seem to know him nearly as well as I do, — only ye seems to like it. If that's bein' a lady an' his wife, I wishes ye joy of it, though ye think me the dirt under yer feet. No, no! Louise Dupré's got more spirit than that if her father *is* in prison. D'ye think she came whinin' ter him for charity to-night? Not much she didn't. It's not favors, but rights, she'll talk about when she once lays eyes on him. O Mother of God! — when she once lays eyes on him!"

She had worked herself into a fury by this time, a complete abandonment of rage, her eyes blazing.

Margaret was perfectly calm. The obvious necessity of quieting the girl could not blind her to this heart-breaking misery. Louise Dupré had asked no pity, but she gave it without measure.

"I cannot listen to you when you talk like that, nor can I stay here longer now," she said; "but to-morrow, when you are calmer, I would like to see you. I will come to you early in the morning if you will tell me where you are staying."

Louise Dupré broke into a loud laugh.

"Ye needn't take the trouble ter call," she said derisively. "Ye'll see me first at Elmhurst, I reckon."

"Very well," Margaret said quietly. "In the morning early, say at seven. I leave Brockton to-morrow, as you must have heard."

Her hand was on the check strap, the carriage door was closing. Louise Dupré saw her intention in a flash

and seized the swinging panel. One of those swift, inexplicable changes had come over her without any apparent cause. She had one foot on the carriage step; her face, now within a yard of Margaret's, was white with terror.

"Ye're goin' for him now," she cried hoarsely, "but don't ye do it. Don't meet him at the station. Don't go back with him to his softly carpeted house, with its warm fires an' lights, an' its dainty food. Don't go! I say, or he'll drag ye down as he drags down everything else he touches!"

Margaret, for once, was touched with a personal fear, for she now believed the girl bereft of reason. But if it were so, Louise Dupré recovered quickly. She had hardly finished speaking before she dropped back into the darkness. The carriage door closed with a bang; the horse, until now held in with difficulty, plunged forward, and Margaret lost sight of her. Nevertheless, an instant later she thought she could hear a voice calling after her: "Don't go back to-night, I say! Don't go back to-night!"

The brougham had just begun to rattle over the Brockton pavements when Margaret, staring mechanically out of the window, gave a little cry of delight. This new problem seemed solved for her even while she was puzzling over it. On the sidewalk, within a few yards of her, walking rapidly toward her, was her brother Reggie. He saw her, or rather the Levenson carriage, almost as soon as she saw him, and paused at the curb as Thomas drove up to it. She was, however, hardly prepared for Reggie's reception of her.

"You must have heard the news," he cried joyously, putting a small, well-shaped hand in through the open window of the brougham, his face close behind it. "I'm engaged!"

"Oh, Reggie!" she said, with a quick catch of the breath. "I'm very, very glad. When did it happen?"

Reggie looked at his watch. There were times when he could be provokingly exact.

"Less than two hours ago. I'm on my way back to the Rectory now. I haven't interviewed the Reverend yet, but I think it's coming through all right. Hilda's said yes, and that's the main thing. I say, my dear girl, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, dear. Do you know where I could find Mr. Meyer?"

"That's not what you wanted to ask me. Something's wrong; what is it?"

"Reggie—if you could only find him! I've just met Louise Dupré. The girl is bent on mischief—I think, rather to herself than others. It may have been a mile back on the road to Elmhurst. I doubt her sanity; her father's crime seems to have turned her brain. She was very threatening and abusive, especially against Ashton. Her hatred of him is beyond comprehension, but that is no reason why she should be left to do herself harm. I want you to find Mr. Meyer—get a horse at the Everett and go in search of her. Alone you could do nothing with her, but he has a wonderful influence with these people. Go to him at once; waste no time. Hilda will understand when she knows!"

She was almost incoherent, and yet Reggie not only seemed to understand her, but to be stirred by her words to an excitement even greater than her own. His face had paled slightly at Margaret's first mention of the girl's name, but he had started violently when she had spoken of the girl's anger against Ashton.

"She made no definite threat?" he paused to ask.

"No, no! All she said was quite vague. My great fear is for the girl herself. She promised to come to Elmhurst and see me in the morning, but I have no faith in her keeping to it."

Reggie looked much relieved. "That's much better," he said encouragingly. "It gives us, at any rate, a fair amount of time. Which way did she go when you left her?"

"She simply stood there in the road, but I've an impression she followed the carriage toward Brockton."

"Good again," Reggie said, brightening.

Margaret could not understand his sudden change of mood. Instead of reassuring her, it seemed rather to deepen her fears. She made a little motion of the hands that was full of earnest appeal.

"Oh, Reggie," she cried, "you'll not delay? You have all your happiness ahead of you. Put this first now. I can't leave to-morrow until I know she's safe. Mr. Meyer once asked me, if I ever needed him, to let him know. Tell him from me I need him now in this one thing. Tell him to lose no time."

Reggie was instantly responsive. The situation was one he could, in a certain sense, thoroughly enjoy.

"Don't you worry about me," he put in reassuringly. "My interview with the Reverend can wait. I'm not hankering after it. Of course Hilda'll understand. I shall call her up by wire every half-hour; we've a private code." As for this Dupré business, count it done. I'll put Meyer on it inside fifteen minutes. I may see you later, *au revoir!*"

He was off in his airy way, almost breaking into a run along the crowded main street as the brougham turned down toward the station. Though his cheerfulness and his ready help had done much to lighten the strain on Margaret's nerves, it was hardly possible for her to share in his enthusiasm just then. The passing thought she gave his romance was tender, nay, wistful, but it was soon dismissed. It would be some time yet before those happy plans materialized, and in the meantime other things were demanding all her strength.

She was very sure she ought not to speak to Ashton about this new complication, at any rate not now. She could not possibly do so without bringing up to him the detestation in which he was held by a certain class, a detestation none the less real because she believed it to be unjust and undeserved.

She had enough, as it was, to worry him with during these last few hours. The disappearance of the papers would probably annoy him, the final breakdown of his old nurse would be a genuine grief to him, for certain of his old associations were distinctly sacred to Ashton Leverson.

In showing a woman's sympathy there she might draw closer to him, a wish more omnipresent with her to-night than it had ever been before, and that was saying much. To-night she clung to it as if it were her one salvation — perhaps it was.

She made her way on to the wet, slippery platform, where, under the glare of the electric lights, a motley throng of incoming and outgoing passengers elbowed each other amidst slow-moving luggage vans and hurrying trainmen. The air was thick with smoke and cinders, beaten down by the rain, which now fell smartly; the panting of a locomotive drowned all lesser sounds.

She had already caught sight of Ashton Leverson descending from the vestibule of a pullman. He was preceded by a porter carrying a dress-suit case, and was followed by no less a person than the Rector of St. Stephen's, Cuthbert Faucon, who filled his proper place in the recessional with dignity. She almost ran toward them in the eagerness of her welcome. She might have said, with perfect honesty, she had never been so glad to greet her husband before.

"I got your telegram just in time," she was saying as she took his arm; "but I was delayed, and was afraid of

being late. Why, Uncle Cuthbert, I had no idea you had been away. I haven't noticed the Rectory carriage. Hadn't we better drive you home? there's plenty of room in the brougham."

They were in the waiting room now, and could hope to make themselves heard, but Cuthbert did not seem conversationally inclined. True, he had come forward to supplement Ashton's greeting, and some warmth had come into his clear-cut face as his eyes met hers, but it faded out again the next moment. As for Ashton, Cuthbert Faucon ignored him as completely as he could do without being rude to Margaret. He declined her offer with grave courtesy, but with no lack of decision. If his own carriage was not there, it would be presently; he would wait.

Poor Margaret was far too much preoccupied to notice his manner, nor that he watched them rather furtively as she and Levenson passed on through the wide door to the sidewalk. She was, of course, far from surmising what was passing in the Rector's thoughts.

As he stood there, he would have given anything short of the good of the Church to have taken her home with him then. Perhaps he would have done it, had he known the full force of the storm which was gathering about her; but he did not know, and the responsibility of taking such drastic measures was very grave. He had already made a great effort to help her, tearing aside all barriers of reserve (a very hard thing for Cuthbert Faucon), and though he had met with apparent failure, it might, after all, lead to ultimate victory. He could at least do nothing more without telling her everything. Had he a right to do that yet?

Meanwhile Levenson was making himself extremely comfortable. The contrast between certain disagreeable things which had happened lately and Margaret's reception of

him was entirely too marked to escape perceptions always keen where his personal comfort was concerned. His failure, as he himself would have phrased it, to "hit it off" with Margaret, had come largely from his always associating her with a certain tacit criticism of himself. To-night these conditions seemed delightfully reversed. He had lately listened, or refused to listen, to a good deal of criticism that had passed the bounds of taciturnity, and he had arrived to find his wife a haven of refuge from envy, hatred, and malice, and all unpleasantness.

It seemed to him, as he drew the heavy carriage rug over his knees and settled himself for the two-mile drive, that to-night she came nearer being in love with him than she had ever been before. Even when she communicated one or two disquieting items of news, she did it so charmingly that, if he felt inclined to blame anybody, it was not her. The reported exile of Jane Kirk moved him to sentiment rather than resentment. There was genuine moisture in his eyes as he remarked:—

"Poor old girl! I've lost a good friend in her, but we must make the best of it. I'll run out and see her when I get the chance. I wired Lindley to spare no expense in making her comfortable. As for that other thing, I would not worry about that, probably some old waste paper out of my room. I don't see why Doniphan should suppose Jane had taken them; don't even see why Doniphan was there at all. I thought he'd cut Elmhurst, like Faucon."

"I did not know that either of them had," Margaret said in some surprise.

Leverson laughed. "My dear girl, you're not observing. I suppose I ought to qualify by saying generally it's me rather than Elmhurst they object to, but it really doesn't matter much. I suppose one can't make a distinct success in this world without making some enemies, even among the Clergy."

"I don't think I quite understand."

She was conscious again of that old oppression, as if something in the darkness of the night were hanging over her.

"Why, really, you must have seen it," Levenson laughed. "I suppose I was a trifle rude, but there are limits to human patience. I got rid of Doniphan when he insisted on running my business for me, and I shall get rid of Faucon if he undertakes to run my morals. Of course, the business of the Clergy is to preach sermons, but they ought to be confined to pulpits. I drew the line when, some days since, I had a letter from your much respected uncle, diagnosing my general moral condition as extremely bad. Well, even that wasn't enough. He came on from Phillie this afternoon, from some church sociable, I suppose, and renewed the attack in the usual Sunday-school style. As I say, I drew the line there and settled him. Let's be grateful we've passed the period when the Clergy can scare us with goblin tales about eternal punishment. I'm a good Churchman in a reasonable sort of way, but I draw the line at personal dictation—by George, I do!"

She shrank back in her corner, her mind busy with the numberless constructions she might put on Levenson's careless words. Could it be anything connected with the transfer of the Levenson Works that had roused the Rector's disapproval? She had reason enough to know by this time that it was locally unpopular. She secretly hoped this might prove the cause, for she had argued herself into the belief that there, at least, Ashton was right; yet the legal transfer of large properties seemed hardly to justify the mention of eternal punishment by those who doubted its advisability. In picturing the pavement of hell one has, of course, a certain latitude of choice, though there *are* authorities. We have tried infant skulls and not found them wear remarkably well. The substitution

of the quivering spines of successful promoters is, however, a distinct novelty not easily grasped by the female mind.

Leverson's reference to his discomfited enemies had, if anything, raised his spirits. The mantle of his success hung upon him like a shining garment. He was almost affectionate in his allusions to it.

"Just think of it," he was saying, as he put one of his great hands on her cold one where it lay on the carriage seat, "just try and realize that we're out of this thing at last. Looking back on it, Madge, I don't see that the life here's been much better for you than for me. Perhaps I haven't been altogether piggish in looking forward to something better than this stagnation."

She was all response at once.

"No, no," she said, "you were quite right. I should have seen it sooner."

Leverson acknowledged the concession with a sigh of gratified pride.

"Of course, under other circumstances," he went on, "it might have been bearable. If we'd had children, there might have been some future worth waiting for. You would have lost yourself in them, women always do, and been less exacting. Oh, well, there's no use wasting sentiment over it. I got over that disappointment long ago, never had any hard feeling about it either, never, really."

It was so evident that he meant to be kindly, even in his utter lack of all finer feeling, that she fought down the sob that choked her. It was quite as well he could not see the girl's face. It might have interfered with this little burst of confidence so rare with him.

"Well, any way, we shan't vegetate in this hole, piling up money for the Hawley Leversons, after our two candles are both snuffed out," he went on cheerfully. "I've always counted on your outliving me. Besides the years between

us, I haven't always lived as carefully as I might. But I'll take more care of myself now ; by George, it's worth it ! ”

(Every word, while it revealed to her so nakedly the man's limitations, showed her, perhaps, a kindlier side of him than she had ever seen.)

“ You remember my telling you about my will. Everything to you for life, outside Aunt Catherine's settlement, — everything, quite unconditionally, you understand, even if you marry again, which at your age would be only natural. ”

The searching wind outside must have touched her ; she drew the rug closer about her. He did not notice it.

“ After you, of course, what's left ought to go back to the name, though, Lord knows, I care little enough about it ! The all-important thing, Madge, is that we should enjoy life while we've got it. Just think of it ! — double and treble what we've ever dreamed of having before. I want you to make a name for yourself as much as I want to make my own. How in thunder could we do it tied hand and foot to a place like this ? I never yet went to Europe for a six months' run without being called back by one of Whitelaw's beastly cables. Even in the New York clubs I'm known as the Pennsylvania Car Man. Well, I'm going to change that, and some other things. I haven't always been very considerate in small things about you, — I've been so beastly worried, — but now you'll see. I've spent no end of time planning for your pleasure this autumn. A month in Newport, and then Scotland ! Oh, Madge, girl ! we'll take an entirely fresh hand, see if we don't ! ”

Though the picture he had drawn for her was a life of his own choosing, not hers, his desire to have her share in its pleasure touched her unspeakably. Margaret's face was shining now. As they passed a flaring street lamp the light fell full upon it, and he noticed how handsome she was.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LEVERSON DINNER IS KEPT WAITING

THE master and mistress of Elmhurst could hardly have found fault with its reception of them that night. They were met in the wide entrance hall by a staff of house servants and a bevy of dogs, the former smiling, the latter noisy, and neither of any earthly use beyond the unrecognized usefulness of a kindly welcome.

"I brought 'em in, sir," Morgan put in with apologetic reference to the demonstrative canines, "they were that restless wot with the storm and your comin', sir. I've never seen 'em so restless, Mrs. Leverson, no, never. Don's been set on gettin' in Mr. Leverson's study this last half-hour, but I haven't opened it up yet, Miss Laurie not bein' down, and dinner bein' held back."

"That's all right," Leverson nodded graciously, "but why are they keeping it up now, I should like to know?"

They were still standing before the hall fireplace, where the crackling wood fire was not unpleasant, after taking off wet wraps; but Leverson's attention was still centred on the dogs. Don, his muzzle lowered to the threshold, was scratching vigorously at the closed door of the study to an accompaniment of low whines. Two terriers and a collie were following this exhibition with absorbed interest, occasionally venting their suppressed excitement in short, sharp barks.

"Odd, isn't it?" Leverson went on, with increasing interest. "Must have scented something. Always are

scenting something, — cats, most likely. Anyway, we'll see."

He had to push the dogs aside and quiet them with a cuff or two before he could reach the door. Morgan had picked up a reading lamp from a side table, prepared to follow, but Margaret had drawn back without quite knowing why. The heavy door had resisted, for an instant, the pressure of Leverson's heavy hand; it must have stuck slightly at the bottom, for it gave first above the middle, then burst suddenly wide open, letting out a perfect gale of wind which swept past them into the hall, lifting the draperies of the door opposite, and making the lamp carried by Morgan flare dangerously.

The snarling collie had sprung past Leverson into the room, but the rest of the dogs still held back. Even Don waited orders before doing anything rash. He was looking back inquiringly at Margaret, who was leaning slightly forward, intense expectation in her face.

"What fool left that window open!" she heard her husband exclaim angrily, and a moment later he had followed the collie through the doorway and a casement banged to. "Bring your light, will you? — the room's soaking!"

Margaret had never, perhaps, heard Leverson's voice to find it more reassuring. A moment before she had found herself possessed by the horrible fancy that he could not enter the room and live, and yet she felt herself powerless to prevent him. She followed now closely behind Morgan, who had entered with the light and many stammered apologies. They were, however, cut short by a cry of terror from his mistress, yet not a terror which bereft her of the power of action. She had, as she entered, seized the collar of the struggling dog, and was holding it now by main force from springing upon the figure of a woman crouching on the hearth beside the fireless grate.

She had recognized the figure even before it rose and faced her. It was one of those moments when the first quick impress of a strong personality carries with it the instant recall of many previous impressions, all fraught with the same meaning. The note struck vibrates in unison with other chords farther back in memory, each strengthening the other. Margaret's shrinking dislike of Louise Dupré as she had seen her months before at the Raggles's cottage, all she had learned of her since, down to the girl's threat or warning two hours before, swept through her mind at the moment when she was straining every muscle to hold the dog. Louise Dupré had come very near the truth when she had styled her visit a matter of life and death. It was, — for her.

Ashton Levenson's mind was not, perhaps, overrapid, but his temper was. Margaret's cry had centred his attention on the dog trying to get at something, he knew not what, but that was quite enough. His instinct of discipline, of very rigorous discipline, was even stronger than his fear for his wife. His great hand closed, not on the dog's collar, but on its throat. He lifted it as easily as if it had been a kitten. Its sharp yelp of pain was stifled to a gurgle as he flung it from him out through the open door into the cowed pack outside.

His heavy cheeks were purple with rage, even the handsome brown eyes were slightly bloodshot. There was, for the moment, something horribly animal about him, but not the kind of animal that knows fear. Doniphan had been something more than carelessly satirical in mentally cataloguing Levenson as "The King of Beasts."

He looked it now as he addressed the quaking Morgan.

"Get out, will you, and shut that door." The heavy finger which pointed at it shook slightly. "I'll see you tomorrow about bringing kennel dogs into the house, or, —" and he glanced now for the first time at the figure on the

hearth, "or mendicant mill hands into my private study either, by Jove!"

"She must have got in by the window, sir, she must really," Morgan began humbly; but a smothered exclamation from his master cut him short, and he fled expeditiously, closing the door behind him with more noise than usual.

Louise Dupré had risen now and stood there on the hearth, facing them. She had maintained absolute silence, though her eyes, following Leverson's every moment, showed she was listening.

"You'd better go too, Madge," Leverson went on, a marked change in his tone when he addressed her. "The room's damp as a marsh, and cold. I'll have a fire after dinner."

The girl by the mantelpiece shifted her weight from one hip to the other, and glanced down, as Leverson made this reference, at the basket grate below. Her face before had been simply attentive; now it brightened all at once. A curious smile, either amusement or satisfaction, warmed it, if only for a moment. Perhaps, being thinly clad, and drenched in her two miles' walk from Brockton, the mere suggestion of fire was inspiriting. The materials for one were already laid in the basket grate — half a dozen pieces of cannel coal on a small bundle of sticks and shavings. It only required a match to set it into a bright blaze.

Margaret moved, not toward the door, but toward her husband. She felt bound to tell him what she knew about the girl, though she was far from any sense of the danger in which he stood. Leverson at the moment did not look as if he required protection. She spoke in a voice intended for his ear alone, but she was nervous from the strain of the last few moments, and spoke hurriedly.

"She is the daughter of that unfortunate man Dupré. They both seem possessed by a singular inexplicable hatred toward you. I met her earlier in the evening,

on the Brockton road; she was full then of incoherent threats. I feared for her reason and sent Reggie with a message to the Preacher Meyer. But they would not think of coming here. Had I not better telephone to Brockton, to Dr. Lindley?"

Leverson was perfectly cool now, for his interests, as he saw them, required it. His sole object was to get Margaret out of the room without a scene. He disliked disagreeable revelations, but he disliked the scenes which invariably followed them still more.

"Do nothing," he said hurriedly, "until you hear from me. I can't have her here, whatever she is or wants; meanwhile she's not fit company for you. Go, please."

Margaret made a little gesture of assent.

"Do be careful, and if you can, be kind," she whispered, as she turned to leave him.

Louise Dupré broke into a loud, mirthless laugh.

"Don't go!" she cried mockingly. "There's been one crazy woman took away from Elmhurst already; that's enough for one day, ain't it? Like as not she had suthin' agin him it wouldn't do ter tell. An' now her mouth's shut, ain't it? Well, mine ain't, not yet! No! by the vengeance of God, not yet!"

Margaret had paused with her hand on the door as if held there. She was looking fixedly at Louise Dupré, whose words, wild as they were, had too much fixed purpose in them for madness. There was no touch of reproach in Margaret's eyes, only a look of startled inquiry. It was clear the other woman accused Leverson of something — of what?

"You'd better go," Leverson repeated, this time with just a suggestion of impatience. The situation was getting urgent. It was hard to remain quite tranquil. The two women still regarded one another. The hot flush of anger had died out of Louise Dupré face under Margaret's

steady gaze ; some sense of compunction seemed stirring in her.

"I did my best to keep her away to-night, — ask her if I didn't," she said sulkily. "Cos she's a lady, that's why. But I don't care now, — not if her bein' here'll make him suffer any more. Not more'n two hours ago I said I wouldn't take her place, and I meant it too, I did. After all, I'm free, but she's tied to him for life. O Mother of God ! For life !"

All power of movement, save the movement of a pitilessly active brain, had left Margaret now. Leverson had turned toward the woman by the fireplace. He was ashy pale. For an instant it looked as if he would strike her down, but she went on, not even deigning a glance at him.

"Yes, he's had his will with her as he has wid everythin' else he's touched, just because he's that masterful he'd have it whatever come. Did he ever care for man, woman, or child, if he got his way easier by not carin' ? Did he even take the trouble to pretend he cared ? Not he ! Did he ever tell Louise Dupré he loved her as some of 'em would. Not once ! She was only wanted — she was, — an' what he wants he snatches !"

She still addressed Margaret, who had shrunk back into the farthest corner of the room. Her eyes were not on the girl, but on her husband, in a fixed, stony stare. One glance at her told Leverson that he had got to play this game carefully or throw up his hand. Women like Margaret had prejudices which had got to be taken into account. Hard lines, to-night of all nights ! It had occurred to him (and beyond that he had no great sense of responsibility) that he had not been quite square with Margaret, and just now it looked as if his chances of being so were slipping away from him.

He was, as Louise Dupré talked on, running over in his mind what he should do. Lying never for a moment

occurred to him. Lying presupposes a condition of moral cowardice, and he was not yet sufficiently cowed. He was not conscious of having done anything very much out of the way, only something which required delicate explanation, a gift of tongue he was not quite sure he possessed. It suddenly occurred to him that he could talk very much better if he smoked. He drew out a cigar, and, walking deliberately over to his study table, struck a match.

"I think on your own account you'll find it safer to go now," he remarked, glancing toward the fireplace as he blew out a mouthful of smoke. "You've risked a good deal in coming here to-night. You've been wanted for some time past by the Brockton police. It's been rumored that that attack on young Thallon was intended for me. Your actions to-night rather carry out that theory. Antoine Dupré may have struck the blow, but it looks very much as if some one else put him up to it. I'm willing to give you half an hour's start if you go now, because I dislike being mixed up in that kind of thing. If you don't go now, you'll not go at all without proper escort."

He had spoken slowly, still holding the flaring match in his hand, and as he finished he tossed it carelessly toward the grate. The action seemed to have more effect upon the girl than what he said. Her eyes never left the little bit of burning wood as it made its tiny arc of fire through the air, and by a quick, dexterous movement, she caught it just above the little pile of shavings, — caught it in her naked hand and crushed it out.

"He can't have his fire yet till I'm gone," she said, with a coarse laugh; "an' I'm most gone now, for my work's most done. Yes, I know I've only got what I deserves, but that can't keep me from sharin' it with him. My life's been short enough, but it's been lively, anyway! I've been locked out many a night like this, when it was either stay out and die or take shelter where I could, an' I took

it. It's the old story agin to-night. To be given half an hour's start! O gracious Heaven, half an hour's start, and no questions asked — by him!"

She had turned upon them a defiant face, flushed and scornful, holding both her listeners by the power of her brilliant black eyes as she went on mockingly:—

"Oh, yes! he'll have his fire, his cosey fire, all by himself. Oh, yes! for Madam will not share it with him to-night, not she. An' he shall set by it an' enjoy it all alone. Light it with his own hand, that no one may take away the pleasure of it. Oh, yes! Louise Dupré is goin' — she can keep warm outside, always movin' — yes, keep warm always movin' — with her half-hour's start. Yes, always movin'. Good night!"

The mention of the fire had touched some old chord of remembrance in the girl's mind. In the last two sentences she had broken into a passionate patois, neither French nor English, and well-nigh unintelligible. Very likely the Dupré family had been wont to gather about their own hearthstone on such nights as this, when things had gone better with them, years before. Anyway, she knew what it meant.

She had walked over to the low French window and her last words were said in kind of mock benediction, standing by it with arm outstretched. Then a moment, and she had flung it wide open and disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Leverson swung it to after her against the inrush of wind and rain. When he turned back into the room his wife's eyes were still on him. Even he quailed a little before them.

"It is true," she said, in a strangely even voice, though so low that he could not have caught the words had the tone been less clear, less cuttingly clear.

"What's true?" he demanded, reddening.

She paid no attention to his interruption. She seemed, indeed, speaking more to herself than to him. How could he tell the immense scope of the temptation which yawned beneath the girl's feet. Even when she went on he did not understand.

"All true. I saw it in his face when she told her story. And she twitted me with being tied to him for life! And if I were not, would it be worse or better? O my God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

The cigar dropped from Levenson's hand and fell upon the soaked carpet at his feet with a little hissing sound. There was something in the strained tension of her voice, the low cry of tearless agony, that awed him even while he could not comprehend it. He took a step toward her, his hand outstretched.

"Oh, come, I say, Madge! Don't take it in that way," he said earnestly. "I knew it was an outrage that this thing should have happened as it has, but I thought I guarded against it in every way. I'd settled the girl away from Brockton, I —"

There was real pleading in his voice, but it had no more effect upon her than if he had spoken an unknown tongue. It did not occur to him that if it were so, used by him to her, it was his own fault. He had almost laid his hand upon her arm, but she shrunk back from him and waved him off with a gesture he could hardly disobey.

"I am not finding fault with your ill success in hiding crime; I have never blamed you for being stupid," she said, regarding him from under lowered lids, her head thrown a little back, the hand she still held between herself and him palm outward. "Being true, it is better I should know, despite the degradation; much better."

He had opened his mouth to speak, perhaps in angry protest, when his ear caught Morgan's low knock on the hall door. All at once it came to him how important it was

that his thickening domestic difficulties should not get beyond these four walls. Leverson was not, as a rule, so particular; but there was an element of gravity in the present situation that was growing upon him rapidly. There was something very odd about Margaret's face as he passed her to go to the door. Her eyes were half closed, her lips were moving. Had she been much given to religion these late years he might have thought she was praying.

"Yes, I know," he responded, to Morgan's respectful announcement of dinner. "I'll be in presently; but Mrs. Leverson's a bit upset by that infernal woman (who's gone now) and the dog. She'll dine in her room later. You may send Alice there now."

Leverson had apparently forgotten his late resentment against the delinquent Morgan. Perhaps the present did not appear a propitious moment for domestic discipline. There are periods when the omnipresent servant has to be carefully handled. A realization of this important fact had just entered Leverson's head for the first time in his life.

He closed the door without banging it and turned back into the room, facing her. She stood in precisely the same spot, and her eyes had seemingly never left him.

"I think you'll see this in a better light presently," he remarked, in some embarrassment, as she did not speak. "You've got to make allowance for a girl's hysterics, not to mention the gross exaggeration peculiar to her class. Any slip I've made I did my best to atone for. The girl was perfectly safe. No one but that cracked-brained Preacher knows anything; even her father struck in the dark."

All at once the fire of intense anger leaped into the woman's eyes, for they were no longer—never would be again—the eyes of a girl.

"Why trouble yourself to lie about it," she said, with infinite scorn. "Her father did not try to murder you,

but a man who jeopardized his own reputation to shield yours."

"Thallon? Nonsense! He never knew," Leverson put in incredulously. "Why, long before he came here I —"

"Hush!" she cried imperiously. "Spare me details. That, at least, I'm not called on to bear. I do not judge you, I only shield myself. But I must — must at any cost — speak of the future. You once offered to set me free."

He looked at her in undisguised astonishment.

"Well, hardly that," he returned, something very like amusement in his voice. "I suggested a separate establishment and a settlement. Even were I still of the same mind, that would not mean entire freedom — for you. As for the settlement —"

"Do not go into that! I had no idea at the time of taking money from you, surely none now. I only ask for light—air—the right to breathe—the right to moral cleanliness. I ask you now, would you, could you, deny that right?"

Leverson's face was flushed at last with something besides embarrassment. So far he had been, as he told himself, marvellously patient, for it was clearly to be seen the woman he dealt with had reached the dividing line where blind impulse usurps the place of reason. That her keenest suffering came from a struggle within herself he had no means of knowing. He only knew she was saying very disagreeable things, — unaccustomed things, — which roused his anger, even when he wanted to be most patient.

"If you mean a court of law would cut me adrift from you, I dare say you may be right," he said, with some approach to his old sneer, "but before you take a step like that I advise you to think. If the only world you cared for were the gay one you've had a look at once or twice through me, the thing would be different. I admit frankly

you could force a settlement, and that in their eyes would be the main thing. But in the world you care about the thing's quite different. You'd lose caste. I needn't mention the Faucons or Doniphan. As for the Colonel, you'll hardly induce him to quarrel with me at this juncture for the sake of seeing his daughter figure in a divorce suit. Why, Madge, girl! the idea's absurd! You couldn't be crazy enough to let a piece of indiscretion like this of mine (for which, Heaven knows, I'm sorry enough) grow into a noisome scandal, ruining both our lives. You simply don't know what you're talking about. Think of the publicity, think of the newspapers gloating over everything. You ask me to spare you details. Do you think they will? Oh, come, Madge! Don't let's make fools of ourselves at the very moment when we've got the world to choose from. As I said a little while back, let's start fresh."

Never before had he made such an appeal to her. Weeks ago, when in this same room they had met this same question, it had been from opposite sides. Then *she* had been the one to plead one more trial of their married life. There was no denying it, in these last few weeks Leverson's views and feelings about his wife had softened wonderfully. Success had, somehow, made her more valuable to him. He was not going to give her up now on the demand of a pursuing Nemesis in exchange for a load of slime. Men like Leverson are necessarily fastidious. They touch the gutter only with carefully shod feet. When they tire of it the exit is always open.

But was his old relationship with Margaret still open? He might come back to any life he chose, but would he find her waiting for him in quite the old way? He was frank enough to admit that she did not look it, as she stood there, holding her skirts about her as if she still feared the contamination of his touch, though he had not again approached her.

"I do not require either excuses or explanations," she said, her voice hard, rigid beyond recognition. "You need offer none for being what you are, as I offer none for being what I am. Only one thing is perfectly clear to me to-night. I have no power to lift you out of the life you have chosen. You have every power to drag me down into it. On the edge of it I use what strength remains to me to resist. If resistance brings down the comments of the world, — any world, — it seems to me to matter very little. Such comment will not, cannot, reveal half the truth. They may say I married you for the Levenson money, that I never loved you and have never in my heart been faithful to you. Well! in a sense all that is true, frightfully true! Don't misunderstand. I was not a mere mercenary. In the coarser sense I did not marry you for the money, but because I believed you possessed of a power for great good and because I believed you were using it. Looking back upon it now, I see there was nothing personal in my feeling for you, one way or the other, even at first. You pleased me then because you stood for something good, just as you disgust me now because you stand for something evil. But I am no more moved by the one than I was by the other. Whether nobly generous or brutally selfish, I see now I could never have cared for you. Good or bad, you have never been anything to me, are nothing to me now, never can be anything."

She gave him no chance for a reply, even had he dared one. For once he stood before her helpless as she swept past him out of the room.

"I've got to give her time," he muttered. "She's got an everlasting fund of common sense. I'll order dinner sent to her room. She'll see me by to-morrow."

He looked moodily at the fireless grate below him. Louise Dupré's prophecy seemed to be coming true. He seemed fated to enjoy his study fire alone to-night. "I'll

light it now," he said to himself. "I must have taken cold; I'm chilled through!"

He had straightened himself to get a match from the shelf above when he heard Morgan at the door again. The interruption annoyed him, though considering the circumstances it was natural enough.

"Come in!" he called out impatiently; "what in thunder do you want now?"

"A gentleman, sir, — Mr. Thallon, in fact," came in Morgan's respectful undertone. "He says it's important he should see you at once. He's waiting now in the drawing-room."

Leverson with some difficulty suppressed the exclamation that rose to his lips. He had already struck the match and watched it burn slowly in his fingers before he answered. All at once some new trend of thought seemed to occur to him. He crushed out the dying spark between his fingers as he said: "Well, show him in. Keep dinner waiting, and set places for two. I may find some use for him."

The last remark was not addressed to Morgan, who had already gone. It had a good deal to do, however, with the look of pleased expectation with which Leverson regarded the half-open door. A familiar step, brisk and resolute, was already crossing the hall.

"Yes, in this detestable tangle I may find some use for him," Leverson thought.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LEVERSON'S LIMIT

"MRS. LEVERSON told me you were coming to-night," Ashton remarked, without leaving his place on the hearth. "And I was rather glad too. I shall be awfully rushed to-morrow."

His tone was perfectly friendly, though it marked, as it always had, what he considered the social difference between himself and his Secretary. Ashton Leverson could maintain that distinction even when most confidential.

Owen Thallon had closed the door behind him, but still stood with his hand on the knob. He had not removed his long rain coat, which, unfastened in front, hung loosely from the shoulders, revealing, as it swung back, an arm still in a sling. This and the bandaged head reminded Leverson of the last time he had seen him, that night at the hospital. Otherwise he might have forgotten it, Thallon was so very much what he had always been. His eyes had a curious alertness in them, and his manner, even before he spoke, was the same manner which had often chafed Leverson without definite reason.

"I thought I'd better see you to-night," he returned, smiling an odd sort of smile. "The time is short, and the matters between us of some importance, — to me at least."

"Yes, I know, about the work. Well, we'll get at that presently, though it's been rather driven out of my mind by less pleasant things. Throw aside your coat. If you like I'll order dinner in here, where we can talk."

"Thank you very much. I dined, in a way, some three hours ago."

"Not really! I seem fated to feed in solitude. Mrs. Leverson's deserted me for her own rooms, — complained of feeling seedy; I imagine she's been overdoing. Women always overdo; they make so much of little things."

Thallon looked at him with a perceptible increase of interest.

"Men make little of some rather large things, sometimes, don't you think?" he asked quietly. "Depends, I suppose, largely on the point of view. To me being knocked on the head by Antoine Dupré seemed a matter of some importance. To the man for whom I acted as proxy, I suppose the affair seemed trivial."

Leverson started to laugh, but paused rather abruptly as his wife's late reference to this same episode came back to him. If her assertion was true, this matter required thought, and thought with Leverson excluded humor.

"Really, now, you ought not to lay this up against me," he began carelessly. "I never asked you to take the part, you know; and even if I had, neither you nor I could have foreseen what it included. I don't wish to appear ungrateful, but — frankly, now — you never put yourself into Dupré's black books on my account."

Thallon looked at his employer with a suggestion of sinister humor in the set of his mouth.

"Make your mind quite easy there," he said reassuringly, "not at all on your account."

"I was sure of it," Leverson put in, quite relieved. "Nevertheless, through your connection with me you took some risks; and, by Jove! I'm not the man to forget it. Let's thank our stars we're through with the whole mud-dle, and none too soon, either. I heard in Harrisburg this afternoon that the Amalgamated is going to swallow up all the local Unions. It's interesting, if true. Doniphan

and that street-preaching fellow will find their employment gone. Rich, isn't it?"

Thallon, if he enjoyed the richness of the situation, failed to show it. He relapsed into silence, his mind going back to the Doctor and Doniphan. If this were true, they were fighting a losing game, and he could by a word throw it all their way; for by a word he could take the Levenson Works out of the controversy. He owed them both much, and he was at the moment almost painfully conscious of it; but he did not waver. He threw aside Doniphan's ambition as he had thrown aside his own, without a second thought.

"You feel you've earned a respite," he remarked with a delicacy of appreciation which to a more acute observer might have seemed a trifle overdone. "A week ago you were in the midst of battle; naturally, you would like to enjoy the fruits of a glorious victory."

Levenson's face brightened wonderfully.

"That's just it," he acquiesced eagerly. "No one knows better than you do what I've been working for; but after all it comes to the same thing. I only wanted an independence, so I might live comfortably and in peace. My happiness may be built on money, but, great heavens! it's not the money itself I care about. I speak freely with you, of course. I've taken you in behind the scenes as I've never taken any one else before. In the first place, I had no choice. I needed some one with a head for business, who could advise without lecturing. Even Whitelaw lectures. Afterwards I grew accustomed to you. Now, when I'm branching out into something better, I don't want to cut you adrift. I'm in a position now to do something for you."

Thallon would have liked to say that his late employer had never taken him in, but restrained himself in favor of obtaining information, rather than imparting it. It was

one of those moments when Leverson, with all his transparent selfishness, puzzled him. He was wondering how far the man believed in himself.

That, however, was not the most vital question. Thallon's one belief in him was, as has been seen, entirely negative. He had agreed with Doniphan in his first assertion that there were certain things this man would not do, and had even gone farther than Doniphan in placing their limits. He had staked the success of his present errand on this belief, and he was as yet still of the same mind. Nevertheless, outside certain conventional and rather vaguely defined points of honor, he knew the man to be a colossal humbug.

There was some chilliness in Thallon's show of polite protest as he said, "But surely the benefit should not be all on one side."

"I never said it was. I never play the goody-good, as you know. What you can do for me, I take it for granted is clear enough. There's no use mincing matters. I'm leaving Brockton more or less under a cloud. As far as I go personally, I don't care a rap what Brockton thinks of me. But I've some one else to consider. The thing touches Mrs. Leverson. You could help me to clear up one or two things in her interests, as well as mine, after we've gone."

Thallon's face suddenly flushed hot and angry.

"You're very good, but the undertaking you suggest is rather out of my line. It strikes me what clearing up is possible ought to be done by you. I came here to-night to urge this very thing, but not to assume the task myself. That this cleansing process is very necessary in the interests of an innocent woman, I quite agree; but even for her sake I'll not soil my hands with it. You may have to wash, but you've got to wash yourself."

The abrupt change of manner for a moment bewil-

dered Leverson. The other man had spoken in a perfectly modulated voice. It seemed to Leverson he must have misunderstood him. If the pent-up anger slowly rising in the Secretary through long weeks had burst its bounds at last, it came through at first in a small, cold stream, but it was cutting a channel rapidly and might be dangerous.

"What in thunder do you mean by that?" Leverson demanded.

"I took it for granted you referred to Louise Dupré. If you did, what I said stands."

A light dawned on Leverson. His manner, too, changed abruptly.

"H-m! So you've been investigating that, have you? By Jove! Aunt Catherine wasn't so far wrong in her estimate of you, after all. Your devotion to me hasn't prevented your feathering your own nest. If you imagine you can sell me your silence on that point, you're over sanguine. I never pay blackmail."

"I thought I'd just reminded you I had nothing to sell. To be frank, I neither desire to feather my own nest nor clean yours, though I have some demands to make. The story you refer to is, perhaps, more common property than you imagine. I've known it ever since I came here."

"Then you admit you've been working against me since you've been in my employ. I've been told as much, but was fool enough not to believe it."

"Against you? Against that side of you which was deliberately working your own ruin and hers, yes, everlastingly yes! And you, at the eleventh hour, having in the meantime tired of it, come to me and ask me if the thing can be patched up. Well, it cannot be patched up, but it can be cut out. By you, no one else. I tried to cut it out some time since, and failed."

"Oh, did you? Now we're getting at it."

Thallon ignored the sneer. His momentary anger was gone. The paramount importance of what he had to do had reasserted itself to the exclusion of personal resentment.

"Yes. I sent Reggie Gilbreed and Meyer on to Philadelphia to find the girl, but it was too late. I came to Brockton six months behind my time."

"Ah, I see. And all in my interests. If so, why secretly, why this reserve toward me? If you found the thing was leaking out, why didn't you tell me of it, like a man?"

"You would have been so likely to listen to me if I had. You were not ready to give it up then, would not be now, except for circumstances which have proved too strong for you. Even that's temporary. In this new life which at present you have decided shall be exemplary, the same thing, or worse, will happen again, if you are not hedged in by something stronger than your own sense of decency."

Ashton Leverson's jaw had dropped. He stood there on his own hearthstone, staring stupidly at this former clerk of his, whose audacity had passed the bounds of credence. He was still utterly at sea as to the man's purpose. His lack of knowledge there hampered him.

"Am I to understand that you propose 'hedging' me in by something stronger than my 'sense of decency'?" he managed to ask, "or do you bring a message to that effect from Faucon or Doniphan? It's quite like them to have put you up to this."

"It's perhaps fortunate for you that I'm the abettor in this matter, rather than either gentleman you name," Thallon returned slowly. "A man who has spent two years in trampling on a woman's sense of loyalty to him usually gets small mercy from other men, when, after seeing him do it, they once hold him by the throat. It may not be to my credit that I'm more merciful."

Leverson glanced at Thallon's bandaged arm with, if possible, added rage, as he walked over to the two doors, and, locking them one after the other, put the keys in his pocket. The dirty work of thrashing an injured man was abhorrent to him, but the mention of his wife's name had roused him to frenzy.

Whatever else the other might be, he was no coward. He had known when he entered Elmhurst that night, with a certain definite programme set before him, that he took grave risks. A blow to him meant death, — his own death, unquestionably, — and yet he had come unarmed. He watched Leverson narrowly, as he paused for a moment with his back against the hall door. He could hear him breathing in hard, short gasps.

"So you make demands, though in your infinite kindness you propose to show mercy, even if you do hold me by the throat. I have a consuming curiosity to know how."

"Perhaps the simile was not especially apt. I have no desire to strangle you, and if I had it would do me no good. I find myself in the strange position of a man who has a claim on everything you possess, which he does not want, yet with only such hold as that claim gives him over your personal conduct, which is what he does want above all things. Let us suppose I forced myself into your shoes to-night or a month or a year hence. I would not even then be you; would have no power to take this sin of yours on my shoulders or repair it. I wish to Heaven I might."

The very coolness of the man stayed Leverson. His former clerk was either crazy, or he had some strong card to play that was worth seeing. The words "a claim on everything you possess" had arrested his attention. Was it possible the man was leagued with Whitelaw or the Colonel or some of those New York men against him? Leverson could at times watch straws. The uncertain

life of the stock-gambler had taught him that much. He therefore listened as Thallon went on.

"Jane Kirk lost her reason, so the story goes, at John Leverson's deathbed. If I have any *raison d'être* at all, I must have got it about the same time. When your brother paid his Western debts, a week or so before he died, he opened the only possible channel of communication between himself and his past. Through it he learned for the first time that he had had a son, that the son still lived. His last request to you was to find him and do him justice. He made it in writing over his own signature. This paper came into my hands to-night, three years late, but not too late to be of service. I've brought it to you now. You see I've lost no time."

The expression on Leverson's face had changed gradually as Thallon went on. Passion had died down, giving place to contemptuous incredulity, replaced in turn by growing caution. Things that had fallen from Miss Laurie in times past came to his mind. Her hatred and mistrust of Thallon seemed suddenly clothed with new significance. The animal impulse of physical vengeance was pushed into the background, if only through sheer necessity. He must at all costs learn more.

"I should very much like to see the paper," he said. "If, as you imply, it is addressed to me, I'd like to know by what authority you opened it?"

"By the authority of the man who wrote it. It is an acknowledgment of my claim upon him as his legitimate son. It has been written three years without being acted upon. I conceive it my duty to see that it is acted upon now. Pardon me, if before coming here I took some precautions. I showed the letter to your attorney, Randal Whitelaw, in the presence of a third party, Dr. Lindley. The latter knew that a letter had been written, and identified the writing and signature as John Leverson's."

There was a momentary gleam in Levenson's eyes.

"But not Whitelaw!"

"Naturally Whitelaw, as your attorney, would acknowledge nothing. He, however, thought the matter of sufficient importance to write you. Here's his letter."

As he spoke Thallon drew from his pocket an envelope carefully sealed with wax and held it out at arm's length. Levenson took it ungraciously (things were not going well enough to make him polite) and tore it open.

The hasty scrawl which met his eyes began, without superscription or date, as follows:—

Oddly enough, I am asked to give you my opinion of a certain situation and by letter, with the understanding that I am not to see you until after the bearer of this has said his say. He, on his side, has agreed that this shall reach you, seal unbroken, which I have my reasons for thinking it will. After you have read it please destroy.

There is no use denying we have been hard hit. Whether his claim is genuine or not, he has a case, which if it came to trial would ruin all our combinations, whatever ultimate result. My advice, compromise if possible. Possession of so-called John Levenson letter worth almost any price. Have not yet fathomed the man's ultimate purpose, but he hints at being reasonable, almost too reasonable for my peace of mind. If you need me, call up Everett, and whatever you do, keep your temper. In haste,

R. WHITELAW.

Levenson read the letter through twice, first rapidly, almost hungrily, then with forced deliberation, as if he were committing it to memory. When he at last looked up his eyes met those of the other man calmly watching him across the writing table.

"Well, I'm ready for the other one," he observed.

"One moment as a mere matter of form. I have here not only the John Levenson letter, but various other documents which are involved in this case. If I submit them to you, I must have your word that you return them to me on demand in precisely the same condition in which you received them."

The color came back to Leverson's face for a moment.

"And suppose I refuse to comply, — to return property unquestionably mine?"

"It does not belong to you. But let that pass. If you refuse my conditions, you refuse the papers. I am here much more in your interests than mine, as I have sufficiently hinted. If you are incapable of taking the hint, so much the worse for you. Such as my claim is, it can be submitted at the proper time to a court of law, where you may find it worth your while to take some notice of it."

If it had not been for that last line in Whitelaw's note — still sticking in Leverson's slow brain — the course of events just then might have been different; but the appeal there to his interests was stronger than the other appeal to passion.

"Come, come! we're wasting time," he exclaimed irritably. "I agree. Let's see the thing, for Heaven's sake."

Thallon deliberately seated himself before Leverson's table, clearing a space by pushing aside a pile of unopened mail which littered it. Then he drew from his coat pocket a bundle of papers and arranged them before him, much as if they had been an important exhibit at a criminal trial.

"Here's the most important one," he began cheerfully.

"Worth almost any price," Leverson thought to himself as he took it. "My God! It can't be true!"

He turned to the signature first and his face went deadly white. If it was a forgery, it was marvellously well done. He had known the signature since early boyhood, — every line, every twist of it — "John Leverson."

Thallon watched him as he absorbed its meaning, — reading his face much faster than Leverson read the lines. There was more or less danger in the defeat which slowly crept into it. Had he, Thallon, been a fool to trust him? Doniphan had advised against it. The fate of the letter seemed at the moment to hang on a thread.

No; after reading it twice Levenson handed it back. He had not reached his limit yet.

"I began with this," Thallon resumed, after a pause, "because it is the important link in the chain. I can prove it genuine through Dr. Lindley, who was present when it was written, though he did not then know its contents. He even recognized the paper used by the dying man as some he had seen handed him by Miss Laurie. Accepting it as genuine, it establishes beyond question the identity of John Levenson of Brockton with the younger man, John Thallon of Belle Plain. That I was the legitimate son of that John Thallon I have been able to prove since I was born. The proofs are here."

One of Levenson's great brown hands rested heavily on the table, the fingers working nervously.

"What do I care for proofs?" he said hoarsely. "The lawyers can pass on that. I can't take the thing in all at once. What's said between us may be put in five words. Supposing you have the power to beggar me, what do you propose to do?"

"In my own direct interests, nothing. I renounce all claim to the use of my father's name. I wanted it once as an act of simple justice to the dead. I relinquish it now for the one to which I was born. Why not? It stands the cleaner of the two. Any blot upon it was wiped out three years ago — with the payment of the Belle Plain debts."

Levenson, who, with hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, had just taken a restless pace or two across the room, turned impatiently to face his companion.

"I haven't the slightest desire to force the name upon you. I'm not so devotedly fond of my blood relations that I'm anxious to possess any more of them, especially those who make long moral speeches. The point remains that apparently you do want something. What the devil is it?"

"Your joint action with me for the release of Dupré. If I can afford it, you can. The placing in Doniphan's hands of a sufficient sum to settle the family in some respectable situation at a distance from Brockton. I say Doniphan because they would not take the money if they knew it came from you. I demand that in leaving Brockton you leave this stain, and all others like it, as far as may be, behind you. I demand that you keep the name which belonged to my father as clean as he kept it. Lastly, I demand that your wife be kept in ignorance of what is past. You owe her that, at least, as it cannot be undone. I owe her that, at least, for many acts of kindness I cannot measure."

Whether it brought back Leverson's anger to the jeopardy of his cause or not, the other man felt these last words had got to be said. Some guardianship of Margaret Leverson's future he had got to assume if this compact were to be worth the having.

But Leverson's acceptance of his terms was worth anything to him short of their modification. He watched the other's face narrowly, estimating his own chances of success.

Leverson's mind was working faster now. The mention of his wife's name had not affected him as it had before, because the man who used it occupied a changed position. An interest in his own moral welfare might be an insult, exhibited by a paid employee. A newly found relation (as he was supposing him to be), with an entirely new and greedy clutch upon the Leverson fortune, could hardly be choked into silence in the same off-hand manner. Even the word "demand," galling as it was, might be swallowed if this young man could be persuaded to take his pay in morals.

As with Randal Whitelaw, the extreme reasonableness of the proposition was with Leverson what made its sin-

cerity so difficult of belief. He had never observed any strong leaning toward saintliness in Thallon himself, nor any morbid longing in him to develop it in others. Yet in casting about for his antagonist's ulterior motive, strongly convinced as he was that there must be one, Leverson, strangely enough, was very far from guessing the truth.

It was his involuntary tribute to his wife — that he could no more conceive of her having a lover than he could conceive of her leaving his own roof under whatever provocation. He paused again in front of Thallon, with a touch of shrewdness not before observable in him.

"And supposing I undertake to satisfy you on these points, am I to understand that you relinquish this preposterous claim in proper legal form, — a regular release, — quit claim, or whatever else Whitelaw would call it?"

"No! Whitelaw suggested something of the kind. I declined it for a very obvious reason. You are not buying me off. I personally do not want a dollar of the money. I simply want a promise; your written bond would be worth no more. In return I offer exactly the same security. As long as you hold to your agreement I hold to mine, that is to say, make no move, but not a moment longer."

"The claim would be barred by years."

"Hardly. I can only alienate real estate, once duly inherited, by deed. I haven't signed one yet."

"The property's not real estate, but the stock of a corporation."

It would have been impossible for Thallon to suppress a look of contempt, even if he had tried.

"Who formed the corporation? It gets its title through you. How much is your deed to the corporation worth if I'm Owen Leverson?"

It looked very much as if he were pushing the defendant a little too ruthlessly. Again Leverson's eyes had that

dangerous red light in them as they travelled from his adversary's face to the papers spread out so carelessly on the table.

He moved a step nearer, but his movement was not as quick as Thallon's. For a man who used but one hand he swept the papers together with remarkable despatch. By the time Leverson reached it Thallon was standing on the other side of the table, buttoning his coat.

At the same moment there was a sharp rap at the door, more imperative than usually came from Morgan's knuckles; yet it was Morgan's voice saying something on the other side — the tone distinctly urgent, though the words through the oak panel were unintelligible.

"You'd better let him in," Thallon said sharply; "something's gone wrong."

Leverson never knew just why he obeyed him. His own mind was in dire confusion. The animal instinct to snatch victory from a desperate situation by brute force was in check for the moment. He was not afraid of his enemy, but he had begun to be afraid of himself. The thing, bad as it was, might be made worse. He had got, as Whitelaw said, to be careful. He turned abruptly, walked to the door and unlocked it.

Morgan stood in the doorway, the picture of well-bred embarrassment. It was not only quite evident that he had interrupted an important conference at a critical stage, but he was not even allowed to explain this enormity in his own way. Behind him two or three women servants with flushed, anxious faces had already pressed forward beyond the reach of his restraining hand.

Before he had a chance to speak, Leverson's devoted servant realized with a pang that the honor of the family was to be dragged before unfriendly eyes. Unlike most of the other servants at Elmhurst, Morgan had never liked Thallon. To-night he not only disliked him, but distrusted

him. It was gall and wormwood to him when Mrs. Leverson's maid, Alice, pushed past him, bursting simultaneously into a flood of speech and tears mingled incoherently.

"I tell you she's gone, my lady, my own lamb's gone, and I only hope you're satisfied," she wailed miserably. "She sent me away half an hour ago, after bein' that sweet she 'most made me cry, and when I went back she wasn't in her room. She hadn't touched the morsel of dinner I'd brought her, just changed her dress and went. On foot too, for there ain't a carriage left the stable, and on a night like this to get her death! Oh, my pretty lamb! my own pretty lamb!"

Leverson, for once in his life, in the presence of a liberty, seemed bereft of speech. Thallon stepped forward, between him and the excited girl.

"Have you searched the house?" he demanded sternly.

"Yes, sir," Morgan interjected, reluctantly acknowledging Thallon's right to question. "She must have gone out through the dining room. One of the long veranda windows was open, and I found this caught in the handle."

He exhibited a scrap of fringe torn from a Scotch plaid shawl.

Thallon looked doubtful.

"Not hers, surely; I never saw it before."

Alice broke in again breathlessly. "An old one she never wore, but she treasured it because it was her mother's. Oh, my lamb — my lamb!"

Leverson shook himself together with a mighty effort. His face was white to the lips and hard as cut steel. He took the girl by the arm roughly.

"You're keeping something back! What have you got there?"

He pointed to Alice's clinched left hand, held jealously against her breast. Her eyes shot fire not devoid of spite.

"The proof she's gone and why! You needn't be afraid, you'll know 'em soon enough. She left 'em on her dressing table, every one she had, even this."

She dropped a little heap of glittering jewels on the table by which she stood. They glowed and sparkled under the soft lamp light, but the thing she pointed at was a little circle of plain gold, unmistakably a wedding ring.

Leverson seized it and held it closer to the light, his hand shaking in spite of himself. Thallon had turned to Morgan as he swung his coat over his shoulders.

"Ring up the stable for Mr. Doniphan's carriage. Then come back here and keep an eye on him, for his own sake. Take these women away. There's no time to waste. I've got to speak to him before I go."

There was no withstanding that square jaw. For that one moment at least this waif and stray ruled in his father's house. An instant later he was alone with Leverson again, but this time the key of the door was not in Leverson's pocket.

"So she knows?" Thallon said, with a deliberation in singular contrast to the rapidity of his last words.

Leverson turned from the table. There was something dead about the face; only the eyes still glowed fiercely.

"What's that to you?"

"Only this. It cuts the ground from under any compact between us. You cannot fulfil your part of it if you wanted to. It's too late!"

"Compact! Who ever said I wanted one. Go to your lawyers and begin your work. If she's—but I can't discuss that with you. Our relationship has never been anything more than master and servant. In giving that up I advise you not to assume any other on your own account. As for the money, what I've got I'll fight for. Pray remember that."

Thallon looked at him with the first touch of pity he had

felt for him in his life. Then the thought of a woman in the storm outside came to him — in a great burst of passion.

“Done!” he said. “You may go to the devil in any way you like, and take the money with you for aught I care!”

He swung open the door to meet Morgan, with the announcement of Doniphan’s carriage. He never once looked back as he crossed the hall.

Not so Leverson. He watched him go in curious silence. Watched Morgan come back and stand at the study door irresolute.

The man shifted his weight uncomfortably.

“Nothing to be done, sir? About Mrs. Leverson —” he began cautiously.

“Nothing whatever.”

Morgan started to speak again. Leverson cut him short.

“I said ‘nothing.’”

Alone again, the man faced his misery, none the less misery because it brought no softening touch, either of repentance or of forgiveness. The predominant sensation in him was self-pity, mixed with some admiration for the plucky way in which he had taken up the gauge of battle. The entire world was leagued against him, and he was fighting it with his back to the wall. His wife who, of course, knew of his threatened loss of fortune, had deserted him in cold blood. Thallon’s interest in her was explained at last. He had let the man go out of the house alive because his life was a much better, cleaner vengeance than his death could possibly be. As for the money, — he would fight for that as he had never fought before.

But the question was, how? If he could only collect his thoughts — decide on the first move. Anyway, it should be made on his own initiative. He would not consult Whitelaw. Through something Thallon had said, he distrusted Whitelaw as much as any one.

He swept the jewels into a drawer of the table, as if he

were clearing some field of action. In doing so he knocked over the pile of unopened letters which had lain there ever since he came home. He had begun mechanically to put them back one by one, when his eye caught the slightly charred end of an envelope protruding from under a business circular. For a moment its significance did not come to him. He picked it up, turned it over to note the address, his mind on other things; then, with a sharp indrawing of the breath, he recognized the precious Leverson letter. There could be no question about it when he drew it out. Line for line, word for word, — it was the same he had read in such misery and humiliation a few moments since.

He saw now, as the scene came back to him, how it had come there. His threatening move toward Thallon had stood him in good stead. In hastily gathering up his hateful documents the traitor had, accidentally, shoved this most important of them all under the pile of letters. Oh, act of exquisite justice! This one all-important piece of evidence — this one scrap of writing, incontestably his — had fallen into his lap without his even asking for it.

He read it again from start to finish to convince himself it was the same, and ended by being very nearly convinced, not only that it was the same, but genuine.

Well, what if it were? His enemies had handled him without gloves, had gained the upper hand of him by a dishonorable trick. He was only fighting them with their own weapons. If Thallon had speciously offered him quarter, they were quits there, for he had declined it. Once upon a time Catherine Laurie had had the keeping of this bit of family history, and it had slipped through her weak fingers. He, Leverson, would take care that, when it passed out of *his* hands, it made its final exit.

Leverson had reached his limit at last. There was no hesitation in his face as he struck a match, and, stooping, held it to the little pile of shavings in the grate.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

MARGARET, too, had reached her limit, reached the end of that story begun two years before when the Colonel had given her away — so ran the phrase all innocent of irony — at St. Stephen's, and the choir had sung "The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden," very touchingly.

Only two years! — four and twenty months! — and yet in them lay the difference between girlhood and womanhood, belief in herself and doubt of herself; high courage exchanged for bitter contempt; high ideals for compromise with conscience. Two years of slow awakening, of tardy recognition, of realization! Resolutions made and broken, clung to, lost hold of. Unanswered prayers that she might fulfil, smothered by the overmastering longing to escape that ran in her blood like quicksilver, tingling to her finger tips.

Then had come that slow, hopeless groping in thick darkness. She had waited for six long months before a barred door, asking, not for liberty, but for light; and now, at last, the door had opened on a dazzling vision of freedom — absolute freedom!

But it had not stopped there. The violence of her first open revolt had carried her off her feet, hurrying her on recklessly, regardless of attendant consequences, which, ultimately, she must either conquer or submit to.

She put all of that back of her for the moment because she still had her part to play. To the last moment, while

she was inside these four walls, she must keep up appearances. It was her last tribute to the prejudices of her class. The very room where she had sought refuge, her own room, pregnant with the tyranny of the life she had lived there, seemed to demand it of her.

Her voice did not falter as she bade Alice good night, though it was so hard that she could not say good-by. Servant or not, she was parting with her best friend, and she knew it, one at least who would note her absence to-morrow and would care.

Even when she was left alone, staring into the dying fire, she kept on the mask. She of all women could afford no indulgence in useless sentiment. The time for regrets, reproaches, the looking back on the might-have-beens, had gone by. The Past was absolutely dead. The subtly tempting Present was all about her, calling to her to take and enjoy it on her own terms. A swift, dangerous current was carrying her on — on — and she was not trying to guide herself. It was so restful after months of fighting not to care.

Yet she had got to think, to plan, if only for the sake of the task which lay before her that night. What resources had she to draw upon? That alone must go far toward determining her first move.

She knew well Levenson's assertion that Cuthbert Faucoun would never sanction a legal separation was true, but it was equally true that the Rector of St. Stephen's was not the only representative of the Church, any more than Mobray Doniphan stood for the World outside.

Both men were far too individual to represent merely a brand of thought. For very different reasons they stood together, opposing a certain impelling instinct which was fastening itself upon her as she sat there. Either would offer her shelter and protection, but to accept it from either would imply an obligation she was not yet ready to take upon herself.

Why should she blush to own it? This overwhelming craving to assert her right to live and enjoy was asking her to do nothing lawless, nothing but what other women who had gone on leading noble, useful lives had done before her.

Any Protestant Church was bound for this one cause to confirm her freedom; and then, why should she not be happy in ways of her own choosing.

The strong individuality of the woman was asserting itself after long repression. Her active mind, freed from the trammels which had bound it down, was taking great leaps into the unknown future. She had parted with self-negation, she had fought her last battle against the youth in her, and, for the moment, it had conquered her.

The wife of Ashton Leverson lay dead amid the ruins of a life of hesitation, of shackled purposes. He had killed her obligation under her oath by his own deliberate act. She owed it to herself, to her sex, to her class, that out of its ashes should arise a stronger, nobler soul. Her natural character rushed back into its broader channel after two years of restraint, in an eddying flood she made no attempt to stem.

Yet even in the midst of it some other chord in her vibrated in discord with the new self-assertion. She went over to her dressing table and picked up a small oval-framed photograph of her mother. The expression on her own face changed to one of eager questioning as she looked at it closely under the light. No devout Catholic could have gazed with more reverence on the face of an enthroned saint.

It was so calm, so confident, yet this too was the face of a woman who had wasted her life in the service of uncomprehending selfishness and ingratitude. Here at least there had been no beating against the bars. No word, no murmur of complaint in three and twenty years had come

from those straight, firm lips. Not from them had her daughter learned Margaret Gilbreed's story.

Was this religion? Not a dogma, but a Life, the kind of life that takes no thought of time because it knows itself a part of the Infinite, the Life Everlasting.

Its aim was so perfectly clear in the presence of its achievement, and its means so simple, as to seem almost childish to a woman who had met a different problem in a very different world.

Living on the strength of a promise! The younger woman knew it all by heart, had tried it, and had not found it possible for her.

It was so typified in her mother's little devotional books, the marked passages from the Evangelists, Psalms, and the "Imitation of Christ." What could they mean to the throbbing life of a world like this, wrestling with great problems and demanding facts, not dreams.

The self-conscious abasement of the à Kempis "Pattern" filtered through such a character had become in reality self-forgetfulness. The problems of her world had been met, not shunned with pious resignation. She had dominated a household from a bed of perpetual suffering, always smiling. If it were inconsistent, it was a glorious inconsistency.

Even the photograph had its line of writing on the back, Margaret's own name, a date, and a quotation. She had no need to turn to it, she had read it hundreds of times since she had first puzzled over it as a child, and its definite value was very little clearer to her now than then.

He that overcometh shall inherit.

She laid down the photograph, conscious of both fascination and repulsion in the thoughts recalled by it. It was useless to tell herself that the standard set was an impossible standard, because this life had unquestionably

been lived. To sneer at its Sunday-school ethics was no answer to the logic of its results. Margaret Gilbreed had lived a strong, brave life, had left the world better than she found it, and had died happy. She had "overcome." If the world wanted facts, it had them there.

Ah! but the elder woman had not been asked to overcome *this*. The instant Margaret's mind swung back to that one supreme outrage, it became unique. All else seemed to follow as a matter of course. Careful! Yes, she would be careful. She would put this other thought, that other face, out of her mind. Beyond that she wanted no help, no counsel. They had all failed her, one after the other, though surely Mobray Doniphan would not have asked her to bear this, if he had known.

No, her natural refuge was with Reggie. She feared his anger against Leverson, but she had great faith in her own influence. She would go on with him to New York. She would make a home for the boy, while he was building one for Hilda. Meanwhile she need not be dependent; her education would stand her in good stead there. Doniphan had often told her that she could earn her living easily as a librarian or literary secretary, and though he had said it jokingly, she had known that he meant it. The idea carried such alluring possibilities. To be unknown, lost in a great city, lost in her work, lost to the last vestige of her present life. What retirement from the world could make her as safe as that? Poor Margaret! Wise, oh, so wise, at one and twenty!

She had never been dressed by Alice as rapidly as she dressed herself that night, in one of her school dresses, kept until now for the sake of old association. Everything, thanks to her expected departure, was in order. Her household account books balanced to a penny, and what money she had over she sealed in an envelope with Lever-son's name written across it. She was ready in less than

an hour from the time she had come upstairs. Her mother's pearl necklace, left on her dressing table since the day before, the photograph, and some money which had come to her from her own family, were safe in a little chatelaine bag at her waist.

As she crossed the room and wrapped her mother's old plaid shawl about her, she thought with keen elation that she wore nothing, touched nothing, that had come from him.

She looked back defiantly at a little pile of glittering jewels on the dressing table. She had not been the one to cut the chains that held her, but they *had* been cut, and it was good, very good, to see them lying there, broken beyond mending.

From the man downstairs, from the miserable girl in the storm outside, she was as separate as if they had never touched her life. If anything, she owed them a debt of gratitude. Had they not set her free?

She opened the door into the corridor cautiously. There were muffled voices below, but the upper passage was clear. She sped down it rapidly, wrapped in her dark plaid, like some tall figure of bad omen for the house of Leverson, — as she was, — a sad contrast to what she had been on entering it two years before.

It was too late now for any one to be in the dining room. From the foot of the stairway she passed through it safely and had partly opened one of the glass doors when she thought she heard footsteps behind her in the semi-darkness of the room. She made no pause to verify the fear that shot through her like a knife. If she should be stopped and questioned! She dashed open the glass door and out into the full fury of the storm. Something had caught at her shawl an instant as she passed, but she snatched it free and sped on, her teeth set, her eyes glowing.

Her strong young body revelled in the wildness of the

night. She felt herself a part of it. Moved by her own natural impulses, she was as free as the wind that smote her. Free at last! to live a life of her own choosing!

* * * * *

Thallon paused a moment with his foot on the carriage step to give Dan some brief directions.

"Brockton, as fast as you can, and keep a careful lookout for a lady—a woman—walking in the same direction, wrapped in a dark shawl. Has twenty minutes or half an hour start. Got to overtake her before she reaches the old toll-gate in the Warrenton Road. If she turns off there, we've lost her! Don't you understand, we've lost her!"

His own face was still set and white as it had been with those last words he had hurled behind him at Leverson, but the eagerness in the eyes had become intensified with the image they fed upon.

As the carriage sped on over the smooth macadam, he tore apart the side curtains, regardless of wind or rain. He had already, in his swift adjustment of himself to the change in circumstances, dismissed Leverson from his calculations, as Leverson had dismissed himself, as a factor in Margaret Gilbreed's ultimate destiny. And whose fault was it? he asked himself, with withering scorn.

Not his! By no thought, no word, no deed of his had this night's work come about, thank Heaven! He was stealing no man's rights, betraying no man's confidence. For three months he had, without the asking, defended both from exposure and scandal, and to crown all he had come to Elmhurst two hours before bent on self-effacement.

And he had found what?

Was he to let her struggle on without one word of all he had crushed down, unspoken, since he had first known her story? He told himself fiercely that he asked nothing more than this; that that element of deep reverence which lay at the root of all his love for her, even in its most

unruly moments, was stronger than ever that night, and in a sense it was true.

Yet, if it were wholly true, why must he see her now, harassed and worn with fighting, weary to weakness, why must he speak then before she took refuge with those who had a natural right to protect her?

He flushed angrily as Doniphan's words came unbidden into his mind, "Your whole attitude turns on your secret consciousness that the girl loves you."

If it had been true then, it was true now, but how could he be sure? He had been willing to efface himself then, with the certainty of adding to her distress as the alternative, but now it was different. She could go nowhere without finding much to bear. Could he not make it easier to bear by just one word?

All this was merely passing through the background of his mind. Every outward sense was keenly strained to catch sight of a fleeing, muffled figure before they reached the old disused toll-gate at the Warrenton Road.

Yet Dan, strangely taciturn and phlegmatic this night of all nights, was the first to see her. They had passed no pedestrians, as was natural, and had come in sight of the limit of their chase, the low shingle roof of the toll-gate arching the main road, the shelter of a room or two built on either side,—the toll-collector's cottage and barn in days gone by. The building would have been hardly discernible in the darkness but for a blacksmith shop just beyond. The wide-open door of this wayside smithy cast a broad band of light across the road, making the older building stand out in strong relief. From inside the shop came the ring of the smith's hammer, muffled on the damp air.

Thallon's hopes had fallen to the lowest depths, when a sharp exclamation of Dan's brought his eyes from the stronger light to that side of the toll-gate in deepest shadow.

Something had moved, had detached itself a moment from the line of wall, then sunk back again, afraid to cross the light.

Before the carryall could be drawn up at the roadside, Thallon was striding through the rain toward the spot. The storm had lulled perceptibly, the wind at last had fallen. He did not dare to call her name for fear of attracting attention in the shop beyond. The dull clink of iron upon iron seemed to find an echo in his brain, the blood in his temples kept in horrible rhythm with it as he pushed on doggedly. He was almost up with her, his hand was almost on her sleeve, when she turned and faced him.

She must have been running since hearing the sound of wheels, for her words were labored, breathless, pathetic enough, without that, to have cut the man who heard them like a knife.

"Oh, why have you followed me, — you of all men —"

He stood stock still in the middle of the road, stunned by the force of this unexpected blow, yet he noted the confession as well as the reproach in her words.

"I came to help you," he said confusedly.

"How can you of all the world help me?" she retorted vehemently, one hand clutching the shawl together at her throat, the other raised, as if in protest. "You are my greatest danger, you know it only too well."

"Not true!" he returned, flushing hotly, for she had roused the man in him. "I could have given you up before to-night without a word, — but not now. No, by Heaven, not now!"

His square jaw was hard set. He drew her unresisting under the shelter of the overhanging roof. The light of the forge fire flared up, and for an instant played on the opposite wall. Some reflection of it made her face stand out with startling distinctness against the black background of the night. A change crept over it as he spoke; drawn

and white it was still, but no longer defiant. She clutched the arm he held toward her as if for support.

"How did you know?" she asked, keeping her voice steady by great effort.

He mistook her meaning.

"Know it? I've known it ever since I've known you," he cried, deep passion creeping into his voice, "and should have known it could have but one ending. And yet I've stood by and let him crush the young life out of you as he pleased, — I, who could have brought him to his knees by a word. But why waste a thought on him. You are free. Yes, I tell you, free, and I have learned to wait, even for what was mine by right."

"Hush! For God's sake, hush!" she broke in, frightened by the torrent of his words into renewed protest, though her own heart had slipped its leash, and was bidding defiance to her will. "What could you have done that would not injure me beyond reparation. What are you doing now but what will make the future harder for me, — a thousand times harder than if —" she paused abruptly, for she could not tell him the untruth that might have made him leave her. No! Whatever came, — whatever the future held in store for her, — she was glad, yes, to the bottom of her storm-tossed heart she was glad that she had known and loved him.

She tried to withdraw the hand he held between his own hot fingers. He saw in her eyes what she had kept her lips from telling by that last supreme effort.

"You do not believe yourself," he cried exultantly. "How can I injure you, I, who owe you everything? Surely you cannot understand. You, who have taught me how to think, to grow, to live, cannot throw me aside as if I had never been. Why have I kept silence until now but that I would not add a feather-weight to the burden you had to carry? But *now*, when you no longer bear it, — when

by right of every law, human and divine, you cast it from you, have I no right to one small word? Oh, my brave, strong heart, — I, who have so much more than merely loved you, cannot I love you still without spoiling your life? I ask no more now, — no, not now. Let the rest come with the coming years, when all these bitter memories shall be softened. Don't let another's sin blast both our lives."

It was an answer to the cry that had sprung from her own breast in that first hour of liberty. And she yielded. For one moment of blind intoxication she bent before the storm of passion she herself had roused in him. Yet she was strangely conscious of what she did. There was something deliberate, calmly deliberate, in her as she put her beautiful ungloved hands upon his shoulders, and looked straight into his eyes. Even her words were measured, though they carried the emotion of a life.

"Right or wrong, I shall always love you," she said steadily, "whatever comes."

He inhaled a deep breath as he drew her to him with some passionate rejoinder.

Even in that supreme ecstasy Margaret was conscious that it could not last. She had already turned to look anxiously down the main road, where approaching footsteps were distinctly audible. The rain had nearly ceased, and sounds were more noticeable. Dan, who was adjusting the headstall of his horses, moved impatiently.

"One moment more," Thallon pleaded, in a quick undertone; "they will have passed in a moment."

"I cannot — I must not stay," she said anxiously. "Even as it is, I have said too much, far too much. Oh, forgive me if I have made it harder."

"I shall never give up hope, never!"

"Hope? I do not know, I cannot judge even myself. I am worn out. Do not ask more of me now."

And yet, as she tore herself away, her eyes answered the light that shone in his.

The footsteps had nearly reached the bend in the road now. Rapid, yet easy, footsteps, evidently those of a young man and a good walker. A second later and he was passing through the band of light thrown by the smithy fire. Through the mist of finer rain it touched a tall, graceful figure, which Margaret recognized instantly as that of Johann Meyer, the Mill Preacher.

She shrank back into the deepest shadow without asking herself why. It was not only cowardly, but useless, for he could hardly pass them without recognition. She realized this almost instantly, and spoke his name just as he entered the gate. She had moved purposely to that side of it where the forge light was more steady. She wished the recognition to be mutual, and she had her wish.

He came to an abrupt pause, and their eyes met, Margaret reading the face line for line, as she might have read an open book. A spasm of pain, of fear, crossed it as his looked past her to where Thallon stood behind her, and came back again. Instinctively she turned to the younger man.

He could hardly have refused such an appeal as came into her eyes, even had it been made then for the first time; but he went no farther than Doniphan's carriage, where he busied himself over the horses.

"I am fortunate," Meyer was saying, in that slow, careful English which betrayed the German only in moments of deep feeling. "Four hours ago you sent me a message, Mrs. Leverson; I was on my way just now to answer it."

The hot color leaped into the woman's face. He could have reminded her of nothing less welcome just then than Louise Dupré.

"Yes, I know — about the girl. She is safe?"

She uttered the words slowly, one by one, as if speech were difficult.

"What do you mean by safe? Safe from what?"

He put the question pitilessly, yet his dark eyes, holding her against her will, were tender. She answered the question because she must. He had a natural right to ask it.

"Safe from death. I dreaded her death by her own hand," Margaret said, with a slight shudder.

"Are we ever safe against ourselves, — even our best selves?" he returned sadly. "For Louise Dupré I have done what I could, but after all it is very little. We found her, and I left her in Mrs. Raggles's care for a night, — yes — and to-morrow again the eternal question. We must all answer it for ourselves."

"How *can* we answer it?" she cried passionately, "put here as we are to suffer without even knowing why."

"If this life were all, there could be no answer to it," he said gravely.

She threw out her hands impatiently. "Yes, yes, I know you believe that —"

"Yes, I believe that. We lay down this life that we may take it again, for what we call life here is such a little thing, and what we call love, however true, however tender, is such a fleeting shadow of the Love Eternal."

He took off his wide felt hat at the last word, then, still uncovered, bowed, as he said with a quick change of manner: "But I detain you, madam. Your carriage waits. I am keeping you from home. Good night."

He was already a half-dozen steps down the road toward Brockton, when by a sudden impulse she sprang after him and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"I *can't* go back!" she cried, her voice hoarse with the misery of renewed struggle, "and you know why. Yes, you know. I read it in your face just now. No, I can't

go back. Why should I bear this shame, this suffering, for another's sin?"

He looked down into her upturned face, drawn and white with agony, his own wistful, but firm.

"Yet that is the first, the very first condition of our being," he said gently. "We suffer and judge not, that we be not judged. Man for man, woman for woman, child for child, and each for all. Sins of parentage branding youth; sins of youth dragging down gray hairs in sorrow; sins of the lawless member tainting the tribe. There is no logic in it, yet it is a thing of universal knowledge, — an altruism that touches the lowest savage and the noblest saint. The answer is not here. We must take the task given us to do, and do it without knowing why."

"I am always asking why!" she cried passionately.

"And receive no answer! Well, what then? Do you believe that the Redeemer on His cross knew why He was asked to die? I doubt it. There was no justice in it, — no logic, from any human point of view, — has never been and never will be any, — yet when the order came down the line He obeyed."

"Obey! What voice bids me sanction sin? Not the voice of God, — not the voice of Christ!"

The words, though steady, vibrated with the girl's intense emotion. She had forgotten all about the man she spoke to, as he would have had her do. His eyes were all comprehending, his mouth firm in spite of its latent tenderness, — as he answered quietly: —

"Christ does not ask you to sanction sin, but to shame it, even as He shamed it. When the time comes for you to turn your back upon it He will let you know, — but it has not come now, nor will it come in this way. He asks you to bear no more than He Himself has borne. Go back, even with bleeding feet along the beaten path of human suffering, to His own simplicity, — doing the will of His

Father as He did it, and you have learned to *know* your Lord."

"Ah, yes, I know you believe in blind obedience."

Her spirit was bent near to breaking, but she resisted to the last.

"No, no; you do not understand," he urged anxiously. "When we reach the limit of our knowledge we have faith, but faith need not be blind. When we can no longer say '*we know*' we use the word *belief*, and even so believe that this tearing apart of our own heartstrings is that He may knit together the great heart of the world. We do not seek martyrdom, but when it comes to us we willingly drink of the cup He drank of, knowing that above us all God reigns, and that underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

Calm as the voice was, the appeal in it moved her unspeakably. Meyer had, however, evidently reached the end of what he had to say. Hours of talk could not have made his meaning clearer to her.

As he paused, the sound of hoof-beats was audible on the wet road from the direction of Brockton. Impatient of further delay, Thallon had left the horses and was approaching them from the other side. He reached them just as a mud-splashed buggy dashed past toward Elmhurst. Just beyond a sharp call from the waiting carryall brought it to a standstill.

"Lindley!" Thallon muttered gloomily; "and toward Elmhurst too. What does that mean?"

Hearing the wheels, the smith had come to his forge door to look and listen. They could hear voices between the two vehicles farther down the road. Both voices were familiar; one Lindley's, the other Doniphan's. Meyer, with an anxious exclamation, had hurried down the road toward them. Margaret and Thallon exchanged a quick glance of intelligence.

For a moment—only a moment—as she stood there

with the man she loved, and the freedom of the wild night all about her, she wavered. Then the fire died out of her eyes, and a softer light came into them as she said steadily :—

“ I’m going back ! ”

He looked at her in a bewildered way, trying to stifle the groan that had risen to his lips. He had been so sure of obtaining what he had asked, and he had asked so little.

“ How dared he come between us ! ” he burst out angrily. “ What does a man like that know of a life like yours ? Who gave him the right to speak ? ”

“ I,” she said quietly ; “ but it is not Johann Meyer who comes between us. Listen ! ” and she poured into his ear a torrent of eager words. She was so anxious he should understand.

It was characteristic of the man that, even in that moment of supreme trial, he did not tell her what he had planned to do for her, would do now if this thing were true. Only once, as, standing in that deep darkness, she drew down the flushed, angry face so near her own and kissed the hot forehead, only then did he burst out in one last appeal.

“ What claim can be stronger than mine ? If this parting were for your own sake, for your own happiness ; but I ask nothing now. Only hope for the dim future. Oh, Margaret, Margaret ! ”

She drew her hands away. What hurt him now would help him later if this thing were right. She must do nothing she would regret to look back on through the coming years.

“ Hope ! Yes, I hope,” she said with infinite sadness, “ but not as you would have me. My life was laid out before I ever met you, and such love as yours was not—never could be—in it after that. This much for your comfort, coming into it as you have, too late to make it happy, not too late to make it stronger. If I yielded to

you now it would be neither. You could not make me really happy. Remember that, and give others happiness who have a right to it."

She broke off, the cry in her heart stifling speech. "Oh, my life! my love! I do not love you less because I give you up, but only more — more — more," it wept, as she hacked at its quivering roots and cut herself adrift from it forever.

Outwardly she was calm to coldness; she moved away from him abruptly, for the Doctor and Doniphan, coming on foot down the road, were almost upon them. Both looked worried, Lindley distinctly nervous, as he came forward and took Margaret's arm affectionately.

"We've just had a message from Elmhurst, Mrs. Leverson," he began, drawing her hand through his arm with that little protective pat common to him.

Margaret stopped short; her hold on his arm tightened.

"There's been an accident?" she said, in a strangely level voice.

Lindley looked grateful for her help.

"Not exactly that. It's an outrage of the Duprés', I fear. There was giant powder mixed with the coal in Levenson's grate."

Margaret shuddered. Doniphan broke in almost brusquely:—

"No, he was not killed; and that being so, the chances are in his favor. We cannot give you any details; we're hurrying there now. I was at Lindley's when they wired. You must prepare yourself, my dear girl, for something serious. There's no question if, as Morgan says, he got the charge in his face, but that he's blind for life."

It was perfectly evident, through all his roughness, that he had a purpose in telling her this now.

She rose to the situation, as he knew she would.

"Hurry, hurry!" she urged. "I will go back with Dr. Lindley if I may, only hurry!"

Thallon had fallen back, but she turned to him, there before the two older men, and held out her hand in her old frank way.

"Mr. Doniphan must be as good a friend to you, Mr. Thallon, as you have been to me. Good night, and good-by."

Thallon watched her disappear into the darkness on the Doctor's arm, that last touch of her hand warm in his. A moment later the old buggy rattled off down the road toward Elmhurst.

He never saw her face again, and he never loved any other woman. Through all the years he carried the picture of that face as he saw it then, — as if transformed: A face no longer convulsed, no longer tempest-tossed, but beautifully calm and still.

He learned as those years went by that she had been right, but he was very far from knowing it then, as he stood with Doniphan in the slowly falling rain.

They were quite alone. Meyer, without speaking again, had gone on toward Elmhurst on foot. Doniphan spoke first, rather aggressively: —

"Your last two moves not having been successful, what are you going to do now?"

"Going back to the Everett."

"Good! Wait there for me. I must go to Elmhurst first. I can't take this thing on hearsay, and, besides, I want to be with her for a while."

Thallon came toward him, his eyes shining. "It's your privilege," he said a little wistfully. "Well, before you condemn my moves, remember I asked no more of her than that — Well, never mind — Good night."

Doniphan caught his arm as he was turning away.

"You still intend to maintain the status quo with Leverson?"

"More than ever. I left Elmhurst with my trump card within reach of the other man's hand, face up on the table."

Doniphan started. "I thought you wanted some definite guarantee?"

"Well, I thought I had it then, and that his power to hurt her ended when she left him. I know I have it now. If this news is true, Ashton Leverson's days for injuring any one are gone by, — poor devil!"

For the moment Doniphan forgot Thallon. He was thinking of a blind wreck of a man waited on by a small army of servants, nurses, and doctors. He thought of the man as he had known him in his strength, — broken in a moment, chained, curbed, helpless, — and he shuddered slightly.

Thallon must have guessed what was passing in his mind, for he observed combatively: —

"Yes! But he'll have her."

"And we shan't," Doniphan remarked, looking him in the eye. "That being so, shall I find you at the Everett ready to be taken back to the Hill Farm? You know I've work for you when you're ready for it. Shall we count it settled?"

Thallon hesitated a moment before he answered: —

"Yes."

His voice was husky, but there was no other sign of emotion about him.

EPILOGUE

EIGHT months later, on a raw March afternoon, two men sat facing each other across the editorial desk of the *Transcript*. The *Transcript's* new proprietor and its equally new managing editor were not discussing subscription lists nor the net profits of the first three months, and yet they were very much absorbed.

"If we were dealing with our old line labor leaders," Doniphan was saying with a spice of malice, "I should know my ground. They were not overburdened with principle and were ready enough to take advantage of lawlessness, but when it came time to negotiate they knew what they had been fighting for and what they were willing to do. With them it was usually a mere matter of hours and wages, but now, with this strike three months old, we haven't been informed as yet what it's all about. On one side we have a 'Central Committee' and a 'President' who issue orders from some sylvan retreat, say five hundred miles west of here; on the other we have the mysterious deity of the Great Combine, enshrined somewhere in its New York office, and to both of these powers that be little Brockton is no more than an advanced skirmish line; may be captured and recaptured half a dozen times before the war's over, and when our Peace Congress meets, be tossed into the scale one way or the other as a mere bagatelle. We're told now, — save the mark! — that it's no longer a question of wages, but a question of recognition. Recognition of what? Of an organization which cannot or will

not hold its own members inside the law! Owen Thallon, this thing is getting beyond our ken very rapidly."

The man's tone was light, almost flippant, but he was speaking to another man who knew him, — knew that at forty Doniphan had given up an assured success in literature to undertake a work he believed lay nearer to hand, and that now, at fifty-two, after years of comparative success, he was acknowledging that modern conditions had grown too strong for him. Thallon saw clearly he could offer him no direct sympathy without offence. He showed it the only way he dared, by saying: —

"Your resignation from the Brotherhood was the only course open to you. When they shifted their ground from demands that were entirely right to demands that were entirely wrong, the time came to drop out. But we're not washing our hands of the affair. We have the same interests every decent citizen ought to have; not working for either side, but for law and order; sweet commentary on the times we live in. Questions of right, questions of decent fairness, of simplest justice put on the shelf, while we fight for the fundamental principle of civilization. Putting the clock back nine hundred years. Yes, it *is* discouraging."

"And my men, my very best men, are in it," Doniphan put in bitterly. "No, not all, — and even if it were so, why blame them without taking into account the pressure put on them by the curse of class hatred. After twelve years of service in the cause of labor, honest labor, they have put me under the boycott — made it a dangerous thing to speak to me. Well, I may be dangerous before I'm through."

Doniphan got up from his chair and moved restlessly over to the office window, which commanded a view of the old Town Hall, with its fenced-in patch of worn grass and the bounding streets, forming what was known as Town Hall Square.

It was characteristic of the two men that they had merely exchanged a glance, though it had been a critical moment, covering an offer of release from Doniphan and its rejection by Thallon. The elder man, though an idealist to his finger tips, had never been emotional, and for the younger, all emotion had died out on a summer evening eight months before.

"I've done what I could," the Managing Editor remarked, as he sharpened a lead pencil, "to unite the opinion of one small town in favor of its own obvious interests, with the usual success. We all know the next move of the Company will be the removal of the Works to Harrisburg. We are all agreed that we ought to keep them, but hopelessly disagreed as to the best means of doing so. The remedy of that small portion of the well-to-do who dare to speak at all is unconditional surrender to the Company. The highly intelligent remedy of the other extreme is to burn down the plant before we let them take it. I'm hoping for something rational halfway between to work upon."

"Yes, if they only give us time," Doniphan returned thoughtfully. "I fear their move is coming very soon, and then we've got civil war. That's what I dread worst. The loss of the Works by violence cuts off my pet scheme, — the buying in of the plant at a figure and the organization of a new local Company."

Thallon smiled a very kindly smile.

"To be run on the coöperative plan, — yes, I know," he said.

"It might have been done," Doniphan went on, "but this, if it comes, ruins it. You can't coöperate with savages."

"Especially against combinations like Senator Gilbreed's. You couldn't make it live five minutes. You'd be hounded to death by the Union and buried by the Great Combine. There are giants in these days."

"I believe I *could* do it," Doniphan muttered, the fierce light of battle creeping into his tired eyes. "I'd *make* them see."

"I hear that Whitelaw's on the citizens' committee of protest against the removal," Thallon remarked, smiling. "Quite like him, isn't it?"

"Very, though *you* can't say much. You gave them all their lease of life when you signed that infernal paper in Whitelaw's office six months ago. Why complain that they enjoy the fruits of their labors, fruits useful at least as labels? They enable us to know them. Whitelaw on his citizens' committee; the Honorable Senator from Pennsylvania busy in Washington with bills for curbing the 'money power,' that is, injuring legitimate business, and lastly, Leverson. Ah, as to him, we'll say nothing."

"And she!" The thought sprang into the younger man's mind, but he choked it down. He knew Doniphan had letters, but he never asked to see them, and the other never offered. Doniphan saw his face now and veered to other things in his easy way.

"I hear Meyer's losing ground fast since he put himself into our company. He doesn't admit it, but they say his Church has dwindled to nothing. I suppose they're specially bitter against him because he wears a workman's clothes and that marks him for a traitor. He looks badly; I saw him yesterday."

Thallon's jaw stiffened at Doniphan's mention of the name. "I wouldn't worry about Meyer," he said carelessly. "His class are fond of urging martyrdom upon women and children, but in recent years they haven't themselves blocked the shambles. My own idea is, that when Brockton gets too hot for this representative of it, he'll simplify the situation by betaking himself to parts unknown."

Doniphan glanced over at his protégé a little reproachfully.

"That's not quite worthy of you, Owen," he remarked judicially. "Whatever else you do, don't get bitter, especially over imaginary wrongs. Once, when this man's path crossed yours, he did right. Don't blame him because you suffer for it."

Thallon made no reply, and presently they went downstairs together. It had been his to bring the subject up, and it was his to drop it. Down deep in his heart he knew it was better so.

As they reached the street Dr. Lindley's buggy was just drawing up at the curb. Before parting for the day they went across the sidewalk to speak to him.

"Any news?" Doniphan asked, as he patted the mare's polished flank.

Lindley lowered his head and his voice at the same time.

"Yes. I had it from Gillis as I left the hospital, that a squad of police were sent quietly down to the Works half an hour ago. They're landing a gang of men from the river side now. That means the removal of the machinery to-night, doesn't it?"

Doniphan shook his head incredulously.

"I hardly believe it! The Union's had the place picketed for weeks. It couldn't be breathed without their knowledge. If it were known, the town would be on fire."

"It *is* known, and the town *is* on fire,—to my thinking," the Doctor said, with one of his shrewd twinkles. "Sometimes there's fire without blaze. Just notice the movement in the crowd on this side of the square, especially by the Everett."

Doniphan turned, as Thallon had already turned, to glance down the side of the square on which they stood. It was not so densely crowded as it often was of a Saturday afternoon. Small groups of men, not more than four

or five in each, were moving at a moderate pace along the flagged sidewalk. They varied greatly in garb, from overalls to cutaways; but most of them had that peculiarity of gait which belongs to the manual worker. Some were talking in low tones, some grimly silent; but there was nothing about them to arrest particular attention, save the curious circumstance that they were all moving in the same direction.

One or two had furtively touched their hats or caps to Doniphan in passing; more, perhaps, had scowled at him and his companions; but the great majority passed by unseeing. These were the best-trained men in their organization; many of them were of Doniphan's own training. There was something grim about his face as he looked at them squarely, — but there was no class hatred in it, — if it held any challenge at all, it was the challenge of man to man — equal to equal.

"There are troops in Harrisburg," Thallon was saying to the Doctor, "but they could hardly be got here in time."

"How absurd!" Doniphan exclaimed half angrily. "How many are we all told? Three here, and we can count on half a dozen more. A show of force might bring on the crisis. They simply can't ignore an appeal to reason. Where is Meyer?"

"Saw him ten minutes ago," the Doctor answered, "on his way to the Works."

Doniphan turned an amused face toward Thallon. The quirk in his crooked mouth was very prominent.

"Sacrificial in spite of all your theories," he remarked, with a chuckle, "and, by George, he's right! The place to meet them is the place of attack. Lindley, you've got to get us there. Nothing outstrips Nell the Peerless."

Five minutes later they were bowling over a hard road in the teeth of a keen March wind. All three relapsed into silence, for each man knew that this thing was serious.

To the Doctor and Thallon it was at best a forlorn hope. Doniphan would not let himself look at it in that way. He had, perhaps, done no more in this cause than Lindley; but in him it had struck its root deeper, there had been so many years when it had been first with him.

Keeping, as they did, to the back streets, they encountered little or no crowd, and therefore the scene that met them as they emerged abruptly upon the space immediately surrounding the old Levenson Works was all the more startling.

A nearly solid block of heads and shoulders filled the entire space of the street itself, and overflowed into the acre or two of yard that lay between the factories and the creek.

Until the last ten minutes this yard had been fenced off from the street by a six-foot paling fence. This fence was now distributed in pieces of convenient size amongst the crowd—a circumstance as suggestive to Doniphan and his companions as the sight of blood.

It was, in fact, not unlike a taste of blood to an angry animal, this partition of their opponent's splintered property amongst the attacking party. All heads were craning forward to get a better view of the side entrance of the Works, where, at the head of a short flight of stone steps, a man was speaking.

The sun, now far down in the west, cast a flood of warm, rich color on the weather-stained brick wall behind him, and bathed the figure itself in a glory. He had never been more beautiful than as he stood there facing death—never more like his Master.

"We're over late to help him," Thallon said, in an undertone to Lindley; "and what's as bad, we're on the wrong side of the crowd."

Doniphan looked up after an instant's thought.

"Stay here with Lindley," he said crisply, to Thallon.

"I can worm my way through, and when I'm through, I'm of more use than a regiment. This is not Meyer's crowd. He's too serious. If I can't do anything with them, then life's a failure."

Before they could expostulate, he had slipped out of the buggy, and the crowd had swallowed him. For some distance Thallon could see him threading his way among broad backs and shoulders; and from a guffaw or two he knew the little man was using his powers of humor to lighten the atmosphere as he went along. Then they lost sight of him, and Nell becoming restless amid the increasing noise, Lindley retired in search of a hitching post, and Thallon watched alone.

He could still hear Meyer's voice, now and then, even its tone of stern protest, but the din immediately about him made it impossible to follow the words. But there was no reassurance in his mind as to the situation. The work of the Company's men, of loading some lighter machinery on the four or five barges that had lain at the wharf, had been interrupted by the destruction of the fence. The barges had already been pulled out some distance into the stream, and their crews and the laborers had taken refuge inside the building. It was the production of these objectionable people that the crowd outside had been vociferously demanding of the thin blue line of police and the half-dozen citizens who defended the various entrances.

Thallon glanced about him in despair. Meyer's voice was holding its own against great odds. That portion of the mob nearest him was still listening and kept the rest back, but they would not, Thallon knew, listen much longer.

"I say, he's played the pious act most too long, *he* has," a burly forgerman remarked with a grin. "Wasn't he in wid the swells, — Leverson's crowd an' all? What's

he done wid them pickin's, let alone wot he got out o' the fools as paid him for runnin' his Church. Salted down, I reckon, where you won't git it agin in a hurry, nuther."

"He's made piles, *he* has," whined a wizened little man — Rough Raggles by name. "He was ullus askin' for subscriptions widout runnin' no reg'lar Church. There weren't no real religeeon in him enyway. Ain't he paid for bein' here now, blast him!"

"He got blarsted little out o' you, yer old sucker," piped the high treble of the Whelp, from the lower branch of a tree. "Hollo! there's Squire Doniphan; wot's he got ter say?"

Amid the general coarse laughter every one turned to look. Doniphan had, in fact, reached the steps, and was mounting them behind the thin blue line that had opened to receive him. The mob nearest him had surged forward as Meyer ceased speaking, a movement checked only by this new apparition that for the moment held their attention.

Thallon began to edge his way toward the steps, not as Doniphan had done, by delicate finesse, but by sheer brute force. He had not gone ten feet before he faced a wall of angry faces and clinched fists. He fell back before the force of numbers and was still sullenly giving way, when a woman's voice said, almost in his ear:—

"Keep quiet an' foller me lamblike. They knows me for no lover of the Leverson Works. They'll go up in smoke this day, thank Goud, but we'll save the Preacher, so help me! Come on! Let's through, will ye! What's we here fer anyway!"

From that moment Thallon's clear conception of what was going on left him,—left him, he knew not how. He only knew he was swung into a human vortex formed by a human sea suddenly gone mad. He could no longer see the steps,—could, in fact, see nothing but a red handkerchief which was bound about the head of Louise Dupré.

It acted as a sort of beacon, to be followed blindly if it could be followed at all.

And it led him very near to death.

That hour he heard for the first time the ruthless cry of an enraged mob. Perhaps some fearless word dropped by the last speaker had fired the latent passions of the beast. Whatever it was, — a roar of rage went up from at least a thousand throats. A black mass of waving arms, heaving shoulders, blanched faces, flung itself on the steps. There was the crack of a dozen pistol shots. The red handkerchief went down, trodden into the mud of the street.

Thallon grasped the iron balustrade and swung himself into the front rank. He had a voice that could reach even above that din, for he was of the great Leverson stock.

"Shame! shame!" he fairly roared. "Don't shoot the men who —"

He never finished the sentence. The angry spit of the pistol balls seemed all about him. He could see the streaks of red through the thick blue smoke and the white dust, could hear a babel of oaths and curses amid the sound of a dozen axes beating on sheathed doors.

He seized a bale stick from some hand beside him and fought his way to the top step. As he got there the door in front gave way and the pent-up stream of humanity surged on past him into the building.

"Help me to get him down out of the crush, will you?" It was Doniphan who spoke, quite collectedly in spite of torn clothes and dust. "And carry him gently, for he's badly hurt."

* * * * *

In the Lindley ground floor bedroom the Rector of St. Stephen's was bending over a strong, brave face that smiled back at him from among Mrs. Lindley's white

pillows. They had brought the Evangelist there, very quietly, an hour or two before, and now with the fading daylight his life was ebbing fast. A deep consciousness of what the hour held for them was written on the stern set faces of the men about him.

Lindley had never seen the Rector so much moved as when he had administered the communion a little while before. None had left the room, for Meyer had asked them to stay, and not to have complied with his slightest wish would have seemed ungracious then.

Doniphan had raised his bowed head to find one of Meyer's long hands resting on it gently. After all, they were mostly strangers to him. He knew Doniphan better than any one there, save the Doctor.

His first question on regaining consciousness had been for his one faithful disciple, Joel, and Doniphan had been the one to tell him of his death, one of six who had laid down their lives for the law that day. Doniphan's voice as he told it was a little tremulous. The majesty of coming death was in the air of the room about him.

"And the girl, Louise Dupré?"

Thallon and the Doctor exchanged a quick glance.

"I have heard —" the latter began, and then stopped, coughed, and tried to nod in his old friendly way as he looked across at Doniphan.

"The girl is safe at last, dear friend," Doniphan put in kindly, and Meyer understood.

"You are all so kind," he said presently. "I am so much nearer to you to-day than I have ever been. Thank you all so much."

The Doctor came across to him. His voice broke a little as he said: "Oh, Man, Man, I was harsh to you once. You've forgiven that?"

A brilliant smile crossed Meyer's face, though his eyes were growing dim.

"I had forgotten," he said dreamily. "We have had so much to do together — and the time has been so short."

"Lie back on these pillows, so," the Doctor went on, forcing back the tears, for in spite of his crust the Doctor was emotional. "Let me open your waistcoat. This way, Thallon. O my God!"

The Rector caught the half-smothered exclamation of fierce grief. These men about him were very bitter that day. He put his hand with a delicate movement, almost a caress, upon the toil-worn hand resting upon the coverlet. Thallon, with his arm under the sinking man, was struggling against a curious sensation of envy. He was envying this man his death. Doniphan was trying to force his mind to take in its reality. It seemed so monstrous, Meyer of all men, to die at *their* hands.

"They shall pay for this," he muttered.

A shadow, the first sign of pain, touched Meyer's face.

"They know so little," he said tenderly, "and suffer so much. Surely, if we may hope to be forgiven, they may also."

Doniphan's face lit up. He was the only man there who comprehended the full meaning of the appeal. Even dying, this man would not compromise. Was this defeat or victory?

Meyer had turned toward Thallon. He was evidently conscious of the shortness of his time. Already his breathing was very labored. He spoke so low that his words reached Thallon alone.

"You no longer resent my having stood between you and her that night?" he asked softly.

The response came hard, but Thallon answered, "No, I did you wrong."

"And you have seen the light as I saw it?" His voice was eager now.

"No, I cannot see, but I can submit. Rest in peace, I will be faithful to your trust and hers."

Meyer's face brightened wonderfully.

"It will come in time," he said quietly, "to you as to her. I should like to have seen her once more," he added wistfully; "she was a noble woman!"

Thallon went softly out of the room into the Doctor's office. He would have liked to have been alone, but that was denied him. It was a day of intense excitement in Brockton. The Leverson Works were burning and troops had arrived. The Doctor's study was full of more or less hysterical women. Mrs. Lindley was vigorously fanning Mrs. Faucon, whose ample figure had collapsed into a large chair. Hilda was leaning over the back of it, lecturing her mother on the sin of "giving way." Outside, in full view of the windows, Ned had taken advantage of the general confusion to turn on the garden hose, and was seated in a puddle of water on the front lawn. In the street beyond Randal Whitelaw hurried past on foot. He was probably making mental calculations of the cost of this day's work to Henderson County.

After an encouraging word to Mrs. Faucon, for which Hilda looked grateful, Thallon went outside and rescued Ned. The child submitted gracefully, for he had grown fond of this new friend. Thallon had become so gentle of late, especially when Ned asked him about his beautiful lady, who had gone away. Thallon had not found happiness, but in his growing love for the child he had, perhaps, found peace.

Inside, by the bedside of the dying Preacher, the shadows had begun to gather already, though the west window was suffused with a golden glory. Meyer had raised himself by a great effort upon his elbow, turning to Doniphan, the old eagerness creeping back into his face.

"You won't give up the fight," he was saying. "You have been so true through these last dark days in doing His will. And His people need you so!"

A murmur of dissent went through the room. They knew he referred to men who had shed innocent blood that day, his own with it, but Doniphan seemed to understand him. He bent over, and as he laid him gently back upon the pillows *he gave the man his answer.*

There could have been no movement in the beautiful lines of the mouth, but by some play of the fading light it seemed to smile back at the strong rugged face above. The two faces were close together. Quite unperceived in the darkening room, Doniphan stooped and kissed him.

Many faces came and went, but Lindley saw nothing but those two, one looking down into the other. Mrs. Faucon had come in and had quite broken down and had been taken away by Hilda. Only the Doctor knew that Meyer still lived. He had fallen into a lethargy from which he only aroused himself a very few moments before the end. Even then the tired brain shone clear, as it ever had at his best, and his thoughts were of the man to whom he had bequeathed his work. The look he fixed on Doniphan had a great beauty in it, as he said softly: —

“The Lord keep and guide you always, and bring you to Everlasting Life through His work and ours.”

Cuthbert Faucon had thrown himself on his knees beside the bed.

“Oh, Mobray,” his voice was thick with emotion, “let us work together, as he would have us do.”

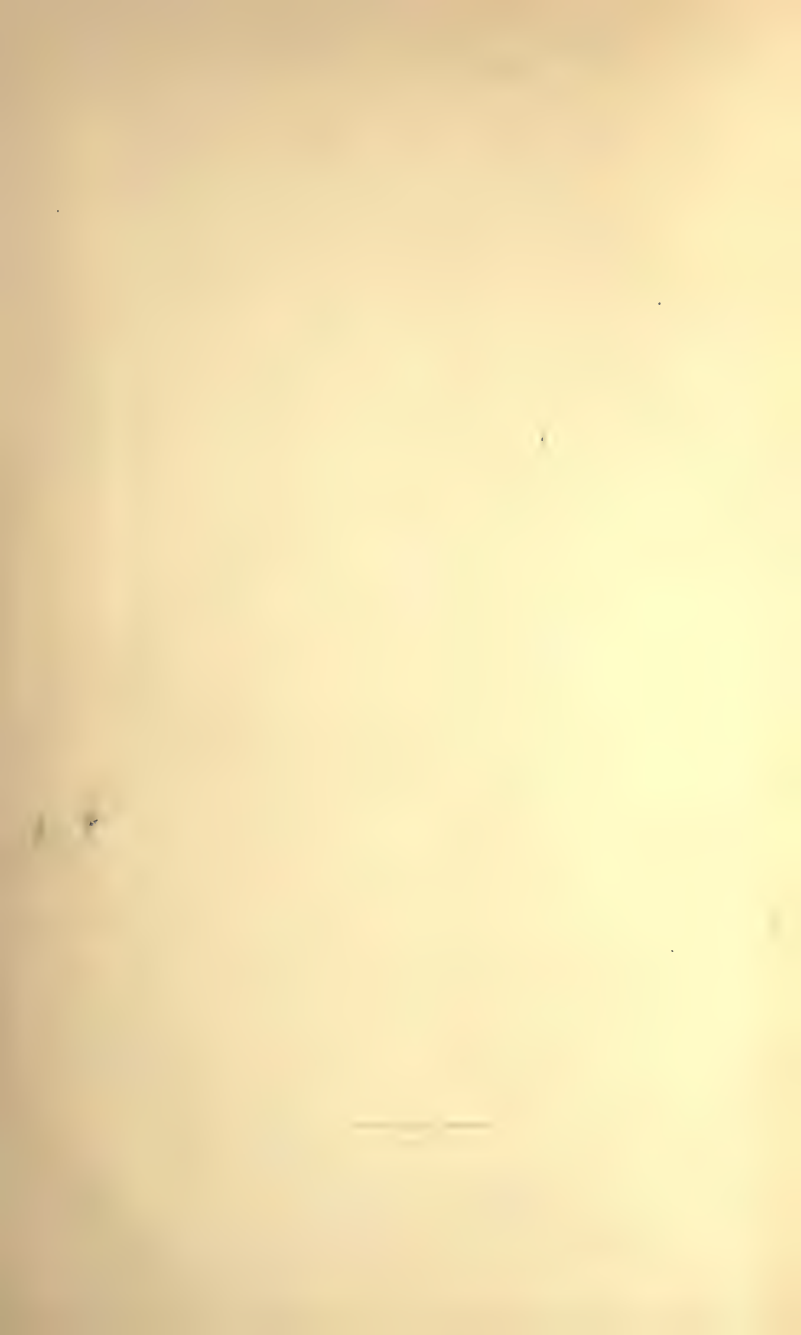
Meyer did not hear him. The light of his eyes was fading fast, but his hand had groped its way across the bed until it rested upon the clasped hands of the two men.

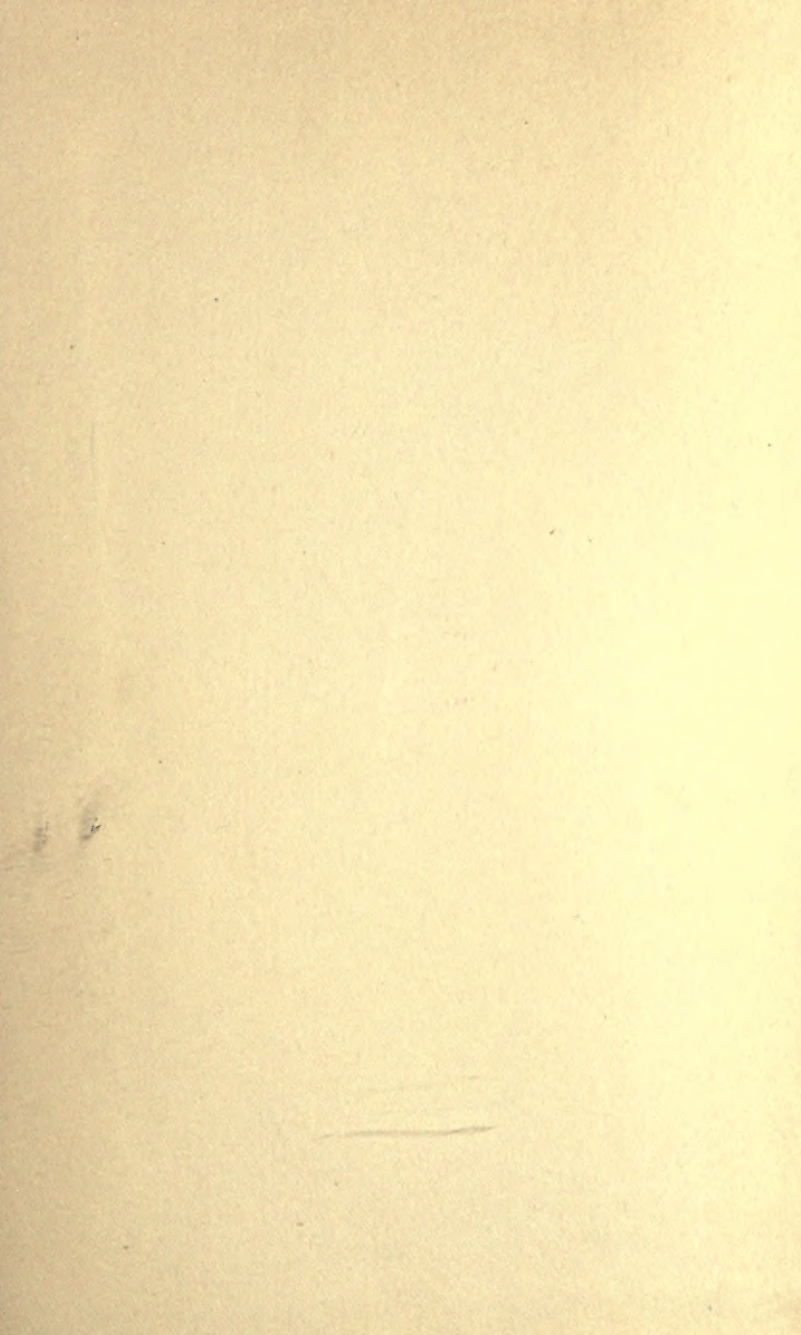
He must have felt the contact, for an expression of great content settled upon his face like a benediction; his lips parted slightly, and in a faint but perfectly audible voice to those who bent over him, he uttered the one word: —

“Coming!”

Then the light went out.







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